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A Tale of Western Texas.

BY ALBERT W. AIKEN,
AUTHOR OF "OVERLAND KIT," "DICK TALBOT,"
"RED RICHARD," "JOE PHENIX," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

THE STRANGER WHO RODE BY NIGHT.

"You may kill me if you like, but you shall not strike me!"

Loud and clear the words sounded on the still night air.

It was a girlish voice that uttered them, and the sounds came from the interior of a little log-cabin that nestled by the side of the road which, starting from Dead Man's Hole, on the Fort Davis and Fort Quitman trail, leads through the lead and silver region of Southwestern Texas, west, bordered by the Rio Grande and drained by two affluents of the "brave river of the north," Providence Creek and the Rio Cibolo.

A lonely—a desolate place, not another house within sight, although by night the lights of the mining-camp, the metropolis of the region, Cibolo City, could be faintly discerned, glimmering in the distance like so many feeble stars.

"DIDN'T I TELL YOU THAT I WAS THE HIGH HORSE OF THE PACIFIC? I RECKON YOU WILL BELIEVE A GENTLEMAN'S WORD HEREAFTER WHEN YOU HEAR HIS HORN A-BLOWING!"

There was hardly one chance in a hundred that the despairing cry would be overheard by any other ears than those belonging to the sneaking coyote, prowling in the neighborhood of the cabin, trusting to find something on which a meal could be made, for the trail was a lonely one, dangerous too at times, for marauders, both red and white, haunted it, and few travelers cared to risk a passage over it after nightfall, unless well armed and in large parties.

But as the French sage remarks: "It is the unexpected and improbable which is always happening."

Just as the words, so full of fearful meaning, rung out on the air, a rider, mounted on a gigantic white mule, was proceeding leisurely along the road within thirty feet of the cabin, and the exclamation was distinctly overheard by him.

Immediately he checked his animal, and the well-trained beast came to an instant halt, the rider bending forward in the saddle to listen.

We will seize upon the opportunity to describe him, for the rider was fully as strange in his ways as the gigantic white beast he bestrode.

He was a man of unusual size, standing over six feet high and superbly built, a perfect Samson of a fellow, yet so perfectly proportioned that he did not appear to be at all so massive in limb as he was in reality.

His head was king-like, with its curling locks of golden hair, its dark-blue eyes, finely-cut and resolute features.

The attire which decked his person was picturesque in the extreme, being a combination of the beautiful Mexican cavalier dress and the wild garb of the frontier.

He wore russet-colored riding-boots, reaching above the knees; into these were tucked a pair of green velvet pantaloons, richly embroidered at the sides along the seams with gold lace, and amid the lace, for ornament, buttons made out of five-dollar gold-pieces were profusely scattered.

His jacket was cut in the Mexican fashion, short, loose and flowing, made of scarlet velvet, also trimmed with gold lace, and the buttons were made out of the old Spanish coin known as a golden ounce, worth about sixteen dollars apiece.

The shirt which covered his massive chest was composed of the finest linen, ruffled and elaborately embroidered with needlework, and in its front sparkled three large diamonds, not one of which was worth less than a thousand dollars.

A costly purple silk sash girded in his waist, and over the sash was a fancy leather belt, profusely decked with silver.

The belt supported a broad-bladed bowie-knife fully twelve inches in length from the guard to the point, and a pair of heavy revolvers, the steel of which was nickel-plated and the butts richly adorned with gold.

A prettier pair of tools the eyes of man never looked upon.

The head of the rider was protected by a Mexican sombrero of unusual size, one of the stiff-rimmed, gold-lace-trimmed sort, but instead of the usual hat-band of gold cord, around the crown of the hat was curled a small, stuffed prairie rattlesnake, so dextrously arranged with its projecting head, open jaws, and glittering glass eyes, that it needed a careful inspection to detect that it was not alive and ready to give battle to any foe.

"Hallo, hallo!" muttered the stranger, "that's an odd kind of a cry to come swelling out on the night air; from the lips of a woman, too; and a young one, if I'm any judge of voices. I really reckon I'll have to take a hand in this game although it isn't likely that my chipping in will be to the taste of the party who calculates to do the hitting; so here goes!"

And with the word the man dismounted from the mule, and throwing the reins carelessly upon the beast's neck as though confident that there wasn't any danger of his stirring from the spot where he was left, walked up to the door of the cabin as noiselessly as though he was a red Indian up on the war-trail.

From the house came the deep tones of a harsh male voice.

"None of your airs now! don't go to cutting up any fandangoes or it will be a mighty sight worse for ye!" cried the voice. "I'm a gentleman, I want ye to remember not to forget that! I'm a gentleman, bad 'cess to ye! and I'll bate ye black and blue if ye dare to go ag'in' me!"

Then followed the sound of heavy steps within and a woman's shrill scream, just as if she was dodging about the narrow confines of the cabin, endeavoring to avoid her pursuer.

"Oh, I must sail in and have a show for my white alley!" the stranger muttered.

With noiseless action he tried the door of the hut. It was securely fastened upon the inside.

Not at all discouraged by this fact, he stepped back and with a single powerful kick, planted on the door directly beside the latch, drove in the wooden barrier with the greatest possible ease.

The open portal revealed a strange picture to the eyes of the intruder.

A young and pretty girl, *petite* in stature, with great gray-blue eyes and flaxen hair, curling in little crispy ringlets all over her shapely head, was struggling in the clutches of a burly, middle-aged ruffian, red-haired, red-bearded and coarse-featured, a regular Irish giant, and evidently somewhat the worse for liquor.

He had seized the girl with one brawny paw and the other was raised high in the air to strike, when the abrupt bursting in of the door occurred.

Astonished at the unexpected intrusion, the ruffian released the girl and turned toward the entrance, savage with rage at the intruder.

The stranger surveyed the man with a quiet smile, ducked his head and ejaculated:

"Howd'y?"

Just as if it was the commonest thing in the world for a man to enter a house by kicking in a locked door.

"Phat's the blazes do ye m'ane by that?" cried the Irishman, utterly amazed by the coolness of the intruder.

"Don't you understand what howd'y' means?" demanded the new-comer, apparently in innocent astonishment. "Wa-al, if you don't, you're the dumbest critter I've struck in a month of Sundays!"

"You murtherin' villain! phat do ye m'ane by kicking in the fore-front of me door? Don't ye know that I've kilt men as dead as Julius C'aser, for doin' much less than that?" the ruffian howled, shaking his huge fist in menace at the stranger.

"Shoo! you don't mean to say so? Why, you are a regular terror then, but how on earth was I to know? I'm a stranger to you; never was introduced in all my life. Why don't you put a sign on the outside of your shanty, 'Mr. Death lives here,' or something of that sort, so that everybody will understand how the land lies? Do you s'pose if I had known what a terrible kind of a critter you were I would have been so imprudent as to kick your door in? No, sir; that ain't the kind of man I am! Why, I would rather kick the hull end-board of your shanty into splinters than have any fuss with you."

The Irishman glared for a moment in speechless rage at the cool speaker.

He was not drunk, nor so stupid as not to understand that the speech was uttered in derision.

The stranger was adding insult to injury.

"I persave that ye don't know who I am," the owner of the mansion remarked slowly, after he had in a measure recovered from his amazement, placing his hands upon his hips and sticking his elbows out after the fashion which is popularly termed *akimbo*.

"Didn't I explain that I had never been introduced to you? I'm a stranger in these parts, on my way to the new camp known as Cibolo City, and, unless I have missed my road, I fancy that the lights that I see yonder, gleaming in the distance, belong to that self-same town."

"Ye'r' right there, me laddybuck! right for a thousand pounds."

"I'm glad of it."

"Small cause have ye to be."

"Why so? How do you make that out?"

"It don't matter the worth of a pin to ye whether Cibolo City is three miles off or three thousand!" the Irishman declared solemnly.

"Oh, but it does, my friend and backer. Three miles I can easily get over, but three thousand would stick me, and I reckon both me and my mule, my bold Pythagoras, would pass in our checks before we could travel that distance."

"You won't go an inch! you're going to stay right here and die where you are!" the ruffian howled.

CHAPTER II.

A DISCUSSION WITH FISTS.

THE stranger did not seem to be in the least alarmed by this startling announcement. In fact he laughed as if it was a good joke.

"You don't mean it!" he exclaimed.

"Oh, don't I? Wait till a while ago!" and he shook both of his huge fists in the face of the other.

"I'll be right hyer, you can bet all your wealth on that!" responded the stranger, carelessly.

"Me name is McKinney—Turk McKinney—and the laddybucks in the town yonder say that whin I get on the war-path, I'm a grand Turk and a howly terror!"

"Well you are a kind of a tough-looking cuss; the sight of you is enough to frighten a skunk into fits, but I'm so big a fool that I never know when I am frightened."

"This is my gurl!" cried the Irishman, "me daughter, do ye mind?"

"Daughter? Well, she don't look like you, for you're an ugly beast," the man criticised.

While the Irishman was gasping with astonishment at this new insult, the girl hastened to explain.

"No, sir, I am not his real daughter; he is

only my step-father, and he's a big brute!" she declared, indignantly. "He killed my unfortunate mother by his ill-treatment, and now he wants me to marry him, and when I told him to-night that I would rather die and go into my grave than submit to such a fate he said he would beat me until he took the ugliness out of me."

"Oh, McGinnis, this is really too bad!" exclaimed the stranger, shaking his head reproachfully at the Irishman, who began dancing, like an excited turkey-cock, first on one foot and then on the other, wild with rage.

"Ye murtherin' blaggard! me name is not McGinnis, but McKinney, do ye mind?" he shouted.

"As long as I get the Mac right, what does the rest of it signify, McGuire?"

"Be he'vins! I'll smash ye, if ye do be afther callin' me out of me name ag'in!" and the Irishman threw himself into a fighting position, working his huge arms up and down like the pistons of a steam engine.

"Murphy, restrain yourself—put a curb upon your temper; and ain't you ashamed of yourself for to go and strike this wee bit of a girl?"

"She's my gurl, and I'll do phat I pl'ase wid her; and now, two words to ye, me bould bucko—Git out!"

"Two words to you, you bog-trotter—Nary git!" returned the other, coolly.

The ruffian looked at the daring intruder for a moment in silence; it was just as if he was endeavoring to make out what kind of a man it was who dared to beard him to his teeth.

"Who the blazes are ye, anyway?" McKinney demanded at last, after he had completed his examination, coming to the conclusion that he could "handle" the intruder, notwithstanding he was about his own size, the perfect proportions of the unknown causing him to appear considerably smaller than he really was.

"Oh, I don't amount to much until you git me started, and then folks generally calculate that I weigh 'bout a ton. My handle is Gold-lace—Gideon Goldlace; Gid, for short; and I'm all the way from California, and out thar, on the edge of sundown, the boys used to call me the High Horse of the Pacific, for you kin bet your teeth an' toe-nails that I am a reg'lar screamer when I get a-going. I'm a grizzly b'ar and a mountain lion all rolled into one. Chuck-full of fight from top to toe and as savage as a meat-ax."

"Oho!" cried the Irishman, in angry contempt, for he believed the stranger was poking fun at him again, "it's a bag of wind ye air, and no mistake, but I'll lace some of the wind out of ye afore ye git out of this, ye murthering villain, ye dirty blaggard, ye scut of the wourld, with yer monkey dress!"

And as he uttered the threat, he came so close to the intruder that his brandished, brawny fist was within an inch of the other's nose.

Then there was a sudden movement on the part of the stranger, a glint of fire shone in his eyes, his muscular right fist shot out with wonderful power, striking the Irishman squarely between the eyes and flooring him upon the instant.

As McKinney went over backward a howl of rage escaped from his throat, and he was so maddened by the unexpected downfall that he did not realize the terrible force with which the blow had been administered.

"Oh, ye thafe of the wourld!" he yelled, as he scrambled to his feet. "Ye tuck an unfair advantage of me, but ye can't do it ag'in!"

By this time he had gained his footing, and no sooner was he fairly on his pins than he rushed at his antagonist, showering blow after blow upon him, but not one reached the mark, for the High Horse evidently was a perfect master of the boxer's art, and giving way before the bull-like onset of the other, permitted him to waste his strength upon the empty air, and then, when the Irishman paused for breath, out went the terrible right fist of the intruder again with pile-driver like force, catching McKinney in the same spot as before, right between the eyes, and over he went with a heavy crash.

This time the Irishman was not as prompt to rise as before—the second blow had, in a measure, cooled his rage, but still he was thirsting for vengeance.

With the wily cunning of his race though he had come to the conclusion that he could not conquer his foe by rushing him down, his usual mode of fighting, and that the only chance for him was to imitate the example of his opponent.

"Oho, it's a boxer ye are," he remarked, with withering contempt in his voice, as he rose slowly to his feet, pretty well shaken up by the force of the falls, and beginning to feel sore and stiff in his joints.

"Yes, yes, I box a little. I see you don't; it would be money in your pocket this time if you did," the other replied, and then as the Irishman cautiously approached he made a pass at him with his left so dangerously near to his nose that the ruffian jumped back in alarm.

"Oh, come up to the scratch like a man!" cried Goldlace; "how do you suppose I'm ever

going to hit you if you hop about that way like a jumping-jack?"

"Bad 'cess to me if I l'ave ye hit me ag'in!" the Irishman growled.

The words were hardly out of his mouth when his opponent made a rapid advance upon him, there were half a dozen lightning-like passes, the Irishman thrashed the air with his huge arms, like two windmills, and then, crack, crack, two powerful whacks in the face the High Horse inflicted.

The Irishman bellowed with rage, and being fairly beside himself with anger, forgetting his caution, rushed upon his antagonist.

Goldlace retreated a couple of steps, just enough to avoid the first few furious blows and then, stopping the Irishman's advance with a left-hander on the chin, which made every tooth in the bully's head chatter, he measured his man and floored him with a right-hand stroke delivered with terrific force right in the center of the chest, the blow so tremendous in its nature that the very ribs of the Irishman seemed to crack under it.

Down he went all in a heap, completely prostrated by the stroke.

His head fell back, and for a moment it looked as if the man was going to relax into insensibility, but after a few seconds the faintness passed away and McKinney rose slowly to a sitting posture.

It was plain from the expression upon his face that the rough handling he had received had taken all the fight out of him.

"Begob! it's not a man but a st'ame engine ye are," he muttered, panting for breath.

"Didn't I tell you that I was the High Horse of the Pacific? I reckon you will believe a gentleman's word hereafter when you hear his horn a-blowing! But come, get up and let me polish you off. I haven't got any time to waste for I want to get into the city in order to have a little fun with the boys before bedtime, for I hear that Cibolo City is a lively place, and I tell you, stranger, I'm a lively coon, myself, when you get me warmed up," and the speaker smacked his iron-like palms together and threw himself into "position."

"Howly smoke! do you think I'm after wanting any more basting after phat I've got?" the Irishman cried.

"Why, of course, you hav'n't had half a thrashing yet. Rouse up, Michael Reilly, and take your gruel like a man!"

"Will ye hit me if I rise?"

"You can bet your bottom dollar I will!"

"Bedad! I won't git up thin if ye stay here a week. Put that in your pipe and smoke it!" and McKinney folded his arms and glared defiantly at his conqueror.

CHAPTER III.

THE STRANGER'S STORY.

"MURPHY, you are a fraud of the first water!" the High Horse exclaimed.

"Me name is not Murphy, bad 'cess to yer impudence! but I'm no hog; I know whin I've enough for me money."

"Oh, you are satisfied?"

"Yis, sur; and it's a fool I am that I was not satisfied before I began, bad luck to me!"

"It's all right, then; but how about this little gal?" and the stranger nodded to the maiden in whose behalf he had interfered, and who had watched the scene with almost breathless interest.

"She may go to the divil and shake herself, for all I care," the Irishman replied, in sullen rage.

"Thank you for nothing!" the girl exclaimed, spiritedly. "All I want is a chance to get away, and I'm not afraid but what I can take care of myself. I have everything all ready, and I intended to run away this very night if I had a good chance."

Then the girl produced a small bundle, done up in a cotton handkerchief, from where she had concealed it in the wood-pile in the corner.

"You are free to go, sissy; but have you any friends who will assist you?"

"No, sir, I don't know any one in this region who would be able to help me much, for I have only a single acquaintance. We have just come here from Fort Quitman; but I haven't any doubt but what I can pick up an honest living in Cibolo City, for I have heard that it is a thriving camp," the girl replied. "All I want is for this man to let me alone. Of course I can't do anything anywhere if he is going to annoy me all the time."

"No doubt about that; but he will not trouble you hereafter, will you, McIntire?"

"Will ye l'ave me name alone?" growled the conquered ruffian, scrambling to his feet, sore and stiff from the scientific beating which he had received. "It's McKinney, I tell ye!"

"Well, McKee!"

"I'll be aven wid ye wan of these days!" the ruffian muttered.

"Mebbe you will and mebbe you will not, but that is what we'll have to wait to find out. But 'bout this gal?"

"She's my gurl! didn't I promise her mother that I w'd be after takin' care of her as long as she lived?"

"I've been his drudge and slave ever since she

died!" the maiden cried, indignantly. "It is little that I have to thank him for. Up at the fort I got my own living by sewing for the ladies of the garrison and the town, and many is the time I've taken my own money, that I had saved, to buy food so as to keep both of us from starving, for when this awful brute got upon one of his sprees he wouldn't work for a week at a time."

"Macarthy, this is a tough charge!" the intruder observed.

"It's a lie, bad scan to ye! I've spent a fortune upon ye!" the ruffian replied.

"Mickey, you are the champion liar; but, little gal, if you want to git up and dust, jest put on your duds and come along with me. I'm bound for Cibolo City, and I'll go bail that as long as I am in the neighborhood of that burg this big-mouthed galoot will not trouble you."

The maiden put on her dingy straw hat and wrapped her well-worn shawl around her with great alacrity.

The champion hastened to open the door for her with as much ceremony as though she had been a queen.

"I'll be aven wid ye for this thrick, wan of these days!" McKinney cried, indignantly, as the two quitted the cabin. "I've a big lot of friends in Cibolo City, and they'll not see me imposed upon! It's a hard row ye'll have to hoe whin I tell the b'yes phat kind of a man ye are."

"Threatened men live long and barking dogs seldom bite. Anyhow I reckon I'm a match for you and all your gang," Goldlace replied.

And then the pair, who had become acquainted in so strange a manner, walked briskly away toward the gleaming lights of the mining-camp, leaving the vanquished Irishman to nurse his bruises and relieve his mind by uttering horrid threats of vengeance against his conqueror.

The big white mule, the stranger's particular pet, allured by some tempting bits of herbage which fringed the trail, had slowly sauntered on, taking a bite here and another one there, until he had got about fifty feet away, when the two came out, but the moment he perceived his master he stood stock still.

"Do you see the wisdom of the brute?" the High Horse exclaimed. "The critter knows he ought not to stir, and so the minute he sees me he's as still as a statue. Kin you ride?"

"Oh, yes; anything in the shape of a horse. I've been used to them all my life, but I'm not going to ride and allow you to walk," the girl replied.

"Well, now, what kind of a critter do you take me to be? Do I look like a noble red-man who leads the funeral on horseback while the women with the luggage follow on foot?" and then, without giving the maiden the least warning, he took her in his strong arms and placed her upon the back of the mule.

"Now, Pythagoras, have the kindness to hump yourself; and, little gal, don't you say a word, or else you and me 'll have a fight, and I swow, as far as I am concerned I don't want to quarrel with you."

"Oh, we will not quarrel," she replied, smiling. "I must let you have your own way if you insist upon it, although I think it is just horrid for me to ride while you have to walk."

"Why, I'm tired of riding, and a leetle walking will do me a power of good," he answered, starting the mule into motion as he spoke by a slap upon the flank. "Besides, we kin talk a heap sight better, with you on the animile's back, for you're sich a leetle gal, I shouldn't be able to hear half you said if you walked and I rode, and I'm an awful fellow to have my own way, too."

"I submit, for I do not see how I can help myself."

And so the two proceeded along the trail, feeling as much at home in each other's company as though they had been acquainted for years.

"And you're going out all alone in the world to seek your fortune?" he observed.

"Yes, sir."

"You'll have a hard row to hoe, little one."

"Oh, I suppose so, but I am prepared for it; there cannot possibly be any greater hardships in store for me than what I have suffered in the last few months; in fact ever since my mother's death that horrible wretch has treated me in the cruelest manner. I only wish I was a boy instead of a girl so that some day I might be able to be revenged upon him," and her bright eyes flashed and her lips quivered as she spoke.

"Don't you worry 'bout that, sis; I'll undertake to warm him for you at any time, that is if the galoot will have spunk enough for to stand up so I can knock him down, but as far as the future is concerned I reckon you needn't go to borrow trouble on account of this critter. He's felt my claws and few men care to try it on a second time."

"You were very kind indeed to interfere on behalf of a poor girl and a perfect stranger too," the maiden remarked, grateful tears glistening in her bright eyes.

"Well, little one, when I heard your cries they seemed to go straight to my heart, and I would

have waded in for to help you if thar had been an army thar instead of that one big-mouthed galoot. You see, I had a sister once, an elder sister, who was jest like a mother to me, for I never knew anything about my mother, for she died when I was a babby. And that sister is what brings me down into this hyer country. When I was a youngster I got struck with a roving fit; it was in my blood, I s'pose, 'cos I couldn't resist it, and I lit out for Californy; my dad, you see, wouldn't hear to my going, so I had to light out 'tween two days.

"Wa-al, I didn't hear a word from home for over five years. By that time I had got to be considerable of a man and had made a leetle pile of my own."

"I was down in Frisco and I met one of the old neighbors, and he told me the news from home."

"My poor old dad had paid the debt of nature, and sister was being courted by a reg'lar swell of a fellow from out West here somewhere, a galoot that owned three or four big gold mines."

"I was glad to hear that she was all right, and I jest jumped at the opportunity to write to her."

"I got a reply in time, written on her wedding morning, all full of hope and joy."

"Then I didn't hear from her ag'in for 'bout eighteen years, and that was jest a month ago."

"A letter reached me in Frisco, written from this town of Cibolo City. Her husband had turned out to be an unprincipled scamp, and had made her life a torment to her, and she implored me for the sake of herself and child to hasten to her assistance."

"And, sis, did you ever hear tell of any man in this neighborhood known as Aban Veli?"

"No, sir, but I really do not know anything at all about Cibolo City, for I was only there once in my life."

"I reckon I can find him, and I say, sis, don't you breathe a word to a soul 'bout this, but jest keep your eyes and ears open. I have an idee that, mebbe, he's sailing under false colors, but I'll find him if he's on top of this yere earth!"

CHAPTER IV.

A LEETLE MISUNDERSTANDING.

CIBOLO CITY was about as bustling a place at the time of which we write as any camp of its size west of the Great Muddy.

It was in the heart of the old Indian country, wonderfully rich in precious metals, but since the days of Montezuma the mines had not been worked to any extent.

When the Spanish invaders ravaged the fair Mexican land and destroyed the empire which had existed for so many years, the wild tribes on the frontier, which had been kept in check by the Mexicans, partly by force and partly by bribes, seized upon the opportunity to extend their domains, and so for many leagues along the whole line of the Mexican frontier, smiling villages, fruitful mines and fertile plains were overrun by the red warriors, and transformed once more into a howling wilderness.

Therefore, for a century and more, the rich metal deposits in the neighborhood of Cibolo City were untroubled by man, for the Indians, with rare wisdom, refrained from working the mines, even in their rude way, for fear that the knowledge of the rich deposits of precious metals would come to the ears of the intruding white men and serve as a lodestone to draw them into the region.

But, as the pioneers forged steadily to the westward, the hostile red-men were gradually forced back, skirmish followed skirmish, the bloody massacre of the adventuring whites was succeeded by the carnage of battle after battle until the power of the red-men was broken and the region rendered available for settlement.

Camp after camp sprung up as if by magic, for it was a good country for poor men, almost any man being able to make good wages even with the most primitive tools for gold-mining.

Another fact which aided to build up the region was the neighborhood of the Mexican towns across the Rio Grande.

The Mexicans for years and years had been well acquainted with the advantages of the region, but they feared to brave the wrath of the fierce Comanche and Apache warriors who claimed the right of eminent domain over the territory in question.

But now that the adventuring Americans with their death-dealing rifles and revolvers had driven the red braves to the wild mountain region, the "Greasers," as the tawny-skinned sons of Mexico are generally termed by the strangers from afar, were quick to improve the opportunity to acquire some of the rich metals with which the land teemed.

Cibolo City, by reason of its superior advantages, was by far the largest town in the territory, and in many respects was quite a cosmopolitan little city, although it could not boast of over five hundred inhabitants.

It had a dozen stores, a good-sized hotel, six saloons of various degrees of respectability, ranging from the first-class shebang attached to the hotel, down to the low den on the outskirts of the town, kept by Paddy O'Dare, and which was

known as the Dublin House, a shebang of the first water, to use the Westernism, a drinking-saloon, dance-house and restaurant combined, the resort of all the hard cases in the town, and generally good for a fight a night and a funeral a week, on the average.

But the hotel, on the contrary, though also kept by a foreigner, was as different from the Irishman's shanty as daylight is from darkness. The landlord was a jolly, fat German, Jacob Harmon by name, but always called by everybody in that free-and-easy style peculiar to the Far West, Dutch Jake.

Jake was the most patriotic man living, and made up for the fact that he had had the misfortune to be born in a foreign land by outdoing the native born citizens in his admiration and devotedness to the land of the Stars and Stripes.

Even in naming his hotel he brought into play his patriotic sentiments. Instead of dubbing it "Cosmopolitan," or "Grand Central," or "Occidental," after the fashion common to the Far West, the sign displayed a waving American flag, and across it, in glittering gold letters, was the inscription, "The Great American Eagle Hotel."

The hotel was quite a stately building for a new camp.

It was about twenty-five feet wide and nearly a hundred long. Two stories high. The lower part being the bar-room and restaurant, while the upper was devoted to sleeping apartments.

The place was well-filled when the stranger entered it. He had parted with the girl on the outskirts of the town, although he had offered to defray her expenses, or advance her a small sum of money until she had a chance to "turn 'round," as he expressed it.

Grateful tears stood in her eyes as she declined the offer.

She had an acquaintance in the town, a poor, honest woman, who managed to pick up a scanty living by washing and mending for the miners too indolent to attend to those matters in person as was the usual custom; with her she could find shelter until she got something to do.

"All right! go your own gait," the stranger remarked, "but if you want any assistance, don't forget yours truly, the High Horse to command."

Thus they parted; Goldlace proceeded first to the hotel corral and arranged for the accommodation of the white mule and then entered the saloon.

It was a motley gathering in which he found himself; half a dozen different races and almost as many colors were represented.

There were white-skinned Americans, ruddy-faced adventurers from across the water, yellow Mexicans, negroes of all hues, from the almost white quadron to the coal-black African, and the copper-colored sons of the prairie and the mountain wilderness.

There were only two of the red-skins in the throng; one, a little, miserable-looking specimen of humanity, very much the worse for liquor, all curled up in his tattered blanket and fast asleep in a corner of the apartment.

The other was a brawny brave, muscular and thick-set, attired in a full Indian rig, somewhat the worse for wear.

He displayed no weapons upon his person, and yet there was something about the savage which seemed to say that he was fully armed, although he did not wear his weapons openly, after the general custom, and that he would be a dangerous fellow to encounter.

This Indian was one of the noted characters of the town.

He was known as Tommie, a most inveterate gambler, and a desperado of the first water.

Much curiosity had been expressed in regard to his tribe, but that was a subject upon which "Tommie" was as silent as the grave.

"So long ago, me don't know," he was wont to reply.

The Indian spoke quite good English, and had no difficulty in making himself understood.

Tommie was not a favorite in the camp for he had figured in half a dozen desperate encounters and each time had succeeded in either killing or disabling his man, but as in all of the affairs the red-skin had been no more to blame than the men who had suffered, the citizens, although annoyed that an Indian should be able to hold his own against white men, could not in honor make common cause against the red-skin.

And then, too, the Indian had some pals, men of his own stripe, who would be apt to make trouble if the brave was unjustly persecuted.

Chief among these was a burly, black-bearded Mexican, known as Jose Camargo, a regular fire-eating fellow, whose common boast it was that he had killed more men than he had fingers and toes.

The Indian and the Mexican were leaning against the end of the bar nearest to the door when the stranger entered.

They had been engaged in an animated conversation with Dutch Jake, who usually presided over the bar in person, relative to obtaining some "bug-juice" on trust, their funds being low.

Despite their eloquence, the saloon-keeper declined to set out the whisky without seeing the color of their money.

"Dot was blayed out," he remarked. "W'ot you tink I am, py chimney gracious? It dakes de cash to puy whisky. Mebbe I was Jay Vanderbilt or Astor Gould or some of dem fellers, I throws drinks away for notting at all, but when I go into dot business, I sells me mine blace out, cheap!"

Just at this point the stranger approached and tossing a dollar upon the bar, requested a "cocktail."

The Mexican and the Indian "sized" the new-comer up upon the instant.

Here was a man with wealth enough to pay for the drinks, and big enough to afford a lively fight if he repudiated the idea.

"Same for me, Dutchy," Camargo remarked, nodding familiarly to the stranger, just as if he was an old acquaintance.

"No cocktail—me take whisky," the Indian observed, and he also nodded to the new-comer.

The brave had been quick to catch the idea of his companion.

"Hold on!" cried the High Horse to the German. "Don't you be in a sweat to throw out those drinks until you find out who is going to pay for 'em. If I know myself I hain't invited these two galoots to j'ine me in a festive bowl."

"Who do you call a galoot?" exclaimed the Mexican, fiercely, equally as ready to fight as to drink.

"Caramba!" and the red-skin ripped out the old Mexican oath with a fierceness that attracted the attention of everybody in the place, "does the white man want to die?"

"Die! go 'long! what's the matter with you, you 'tarnal red nigger? When did you get introduced to me that you dare to address me in this hyer familiar way?"

"Aha!" cried the savage, fearfully excited by the affront, "you call me nigger, I will tear your tongue out by the roots!"

"So will I!" yelled his companion, shaking his fist defiantly in the face of the stranger. "Accursed Gringo! we are men, and he who dares to tread on us must beware!"

"Tread on you!" cried Goldlace; "why, I wouldn't wipe my feet on such a pair of ornery cusses. For two cents I'd pull both your noses off to feed the cats with!"

This was too much.

With a howl of rage both the Mexican and the Indian precipitated themselves upon Goldlace.

There was a violent struggle as the three closed in; then the High Horse got both of his antagonists by the throat, his right hand clutching the Indian, the left compressing the windpipe of the Mexican, and lifted them bodily from the floor, holding them at arm's-length, while the bystanders gaped in wonder.

"Now dance, ye cripples; the band is a-toot-in!" cried the stranger.

Never had such a thing been seen before in that camp.

CHAPTER V.

A MODERN SAMSON.

It was the most wonderful exhibition of strength that camp had ever seen.

There stood the stranger, like a modern Samson, holding the two desperadoes out at arm's-length, his muscular hands clutching their throats and compressing their windpipes in such a manner as to choke all idea of fight out of them.

There they dangled, kicking and struggling, their faces convulsed with rage, yet unable to help themselves.

First the lookers-on stared, amazed at the wonderful display of physical power; then they roared with laughter at the really comical sight.

"Gol durn yer pictur's!" the victor cried; "I've a good mind to slap yer heads together until they crack, you no-souled, white-livered scallawags! The idee of two sich ornery cusses inviting themselves to drink with a gen'laman of my stamp! I'm a white man, I am, and I don't want any of this hyer crowd for to forgit that important fact. I'm the clear white article and no mistake! I'm a stranger to this hyer camp, but when you come to git acquainted with me you'll find I'm clear grit all the way through. My name is Goldlace, Gideon Goldlace, and the boyees 'way out yonder in the land of the setting sun call me the High Horse of the Pacific, for I'm the tallest kind of a customer when you git me properly sized up."

"Oh! I'm the durnest old rustler you kin scare out of the sage-brush from hyer to sundown!"

And as if to give due emphasis to the declaration, he brought the two men close together in front of him, and then, swinging his arms apart again, sent them headlong to the floor in opposite directions.

Both the Mexican and the Indian were game, however, and the rough handling they had received had not taken the fight out of them.

The moment they struck the floor and recovered the use of their breath they grabbed their weapons, and by the time they got their revol-

vers out they had scrambled to their feet, only to find themselves, however, confronted with a pair of cocked and leveled revolvers in the hands of their antagonist.

"Go slow, go slow, my gentle friends!" the High Horse cried, "or I'll be obligated to drill the nicest pair of holes through your ugly carcasses that were ever seen from hyer to nowhar! I'm a terror, I am, and I've got the awfulest kind of a drop on yer!"

There was no gainsaying the truth of this assertion, and after glaring at the muscular stranger for a moment in sullen rage, the two shoved their weapons back into their belts.

"The time will come when the advantage will not be all on your side!" the Mexican exclaimed in sullen rage.

"Voto a brios!" muttered the savage, whose knowledge of the swearing capabilities of the Spanish-Mexican tongue was wonderful, "your heart will I tear from its body and eat some day for this!"

"You'll find it the toughest morsel you ever tackled!" Goldlace rejoined. "But I'll be ready for you at any time, and all I want is half a show, and then if I can't hold my own ag'in' a multitude of yaller Greasers and red niggers, I'm willing for to be wiped out."

"You will hear from us in good time!" the Mexican remarked. "My name is Camargo, Jose Camargo, and men who know me best call me Black Jose. There's blood on these ten fingers!" and as he spoke he raised his hands and shook them in the stranger's face.

"Good deal of dirt thar, too," the High Horse observed. "I reckon soap and water would astonish them a heap."

"Your blood is what they hunger for!" cried the desperado, with venomous fierceness.

"I'm afraid they'll starve to death if they can't keep alive on anything else," Goldlace retorted.

"One more moon of life and then the coyotes will howl over your grave!" exclaimed the Indian, and after this warning the discomfited pair stalked out of the saloon.

"By schimminety gracious! dot was de best thing I ever see my eyes out!" the saloon-keeper cried, delighted at the defeat of the braves of whom he stood in terror.

"Say, how you vas? What business makes you here? Mebbe, you petter works mit me. Shust such a man as you, mine fr'ent, I wants for der grand bouncer. By schimminety! you dake hold de mans of, he think der earthquake was come already, somedimes, mebbe."

The crowd laughed, but Dutch Jake was thoroughly in earnest in his offer.

Such a man as the stranger with the mighty muscles would be a treasure; bold indeed would be the rough who attempted to cut up didoes in a saloon where such a modern Samson acted as grand bouncer.

"Boss, we can't trade—I ain't open to negotiate for any sich position; I've come to this hyer camp to make a living, but I reckon I'd rather follow some other lead than the one you propose. But now, if you and the company are willing, I'll take my drink," replied the stranger.

And such was the impression made by him upon the inmates of the saloon, that at least a dozen pressed him to join them in a social glass.

"Boys, I hate to refuse good liquor, but if I should take a drink with all of you, I reckon I would get hold of a critter that would put me on my back, and not half try, either. So, if you'll have the kindness to excuse me, I'll jest drink success to the hull b'iling, and thank you all the same."

Now, on the Western frontier, it is usually considered a discourteous act for a man to refuse a social drink when tendered in the right spirit, but the stranger by his peculiar way managed to escape from the flood of whisky that was so liberally tendered him without giving offense.

"As one of the representative men of the town, I feel that I am called upon to utter a few remarks upon this occasion," observed a short, thick-set individual, with an aldermanic-like stomach, and a face almost gross in its fatness.

He had little pig-like eyes, twinkling in huge wrinkles of flesh, his face was plainly shaven with the exception of a limited goatee which adorned his chin.

His garb consisted of a full black suit, considerably the worse for wear, and an old silk hat which had evidently seen hard service, was perched in a rakish manner upon one side of his head.

This was one of the noted characters of the town.

Major Bumgartner, he was called, and how he lived was really a mystery, for no one in the camp had ever seen him do the least bit of work; he was not even a member of the noble army of card-sharps, for though, like nearly everybody else, he indulged in games of chance once in a while, his skill at cards was not remarkable, and he as often lost as won, and then he always played for such beggarly amounts that either his gains or losses would not amount to over ten or fifteen dollars a month.

The major was a man of forty-five or there-

abouts, a natural-born orator, as he declared, and really, with his pompous, theatrical way, he made quite an impression upon some people.

The German saloon-keeper for example.

Major Bum, as the miners with their usual irreverence commonly termed him, was continually sponging upon the worthy saloon-keeper for either drinks or eatables, and he carried on his proceedings in such a high-handed way that Jake was generally afraid to do much more than protest against the impositions, for he had got the idea into his head that the frothy major was a man of great influence in the town and could do any saloon a great deal of hurt by talking against it.

"It does me proud to bid you welcome to this classic region," the major continued, with a dignified wave of his fat hand. "Years and years ago the pre-historic man delved here in the bosom of mother earth and wrested the golden grains from the mother lode.

"Cibola City is no mushroom town, but had a local habitation and a name ten thousand years ago; think of that and weep, ye sinner! Stranger, you really must take one drink with us boys for the honor of the camp. Jacob, worthy scion of the German land, set 'em up for the gang!"

The saloon-keeper obeyed, although reluctantly. There were about twenty in the saloon, and twenty drinks at a quarter a head was no joke, for he felt mortally sure he would never see the color of anybody's money in payment.

"Well, gents, seeing as how you press me so hard, I s'pose I shall have to take one drink, jest for luck," the High Horse remarked.

"Oh, yes, it would be gross discourtesy to refuse, when you consider that we represent the town, eager, stranger, to honor you as a man of your merits deserved to be honored."

And then, to the disgust of the saloon-keeper, the major filled his glass to the very brim with liquor.

"Oh, why you fool yourself mit a leetle drinks, major?" Jacob could not help observing, in what was intended to be a crushingly sarcastic manner. "Dake a goot swig mit de liquor. Be goot to yourself!"

"You jest bet all your wealth I am!" the veteran replied, winking to his companions, and grinning in the face of the enraged saloon-keeper, as he tossed off the liquor.

But the German wronged the major; if he preyed upon him he did not intend that anybody else should, if he could help it.

"Now, gentlemen, I know that our worthy host intends to present us with these drinks, but we, as the representatives of the town, anxious to do honor to our distinguished visitor," and he bowed to Gideon, "cannot permit it, so we'll all chip in. Here's my hat, gentlemen, contribute what you like." And then, in the most dignified manner, the major passed around his battered tile.

And the result was that not only was enough money collected to pay for the drinks, but sufficient to defray the expenses of a second, and then, mollified by this clever device, Jacob insisted upon standing treat, and so the major succeeded in getting three drinks without being obliged to put his hand in his pocket, and the strange thing about the matter was that Jacob chanced to be the only one who noticed this fact.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MEXICAN GIRL.

"Now, gents, if you will have the kindness to excuse me, I reckon I'll take a stroll 'round and see the town," the High Horse remarked. He was not much of a drinking man, and he was afraid, from the way things had begun, that the proceedings would degenerate into a trial of skill to see which of the party could hold the most fire water.

The rest were reluctant to let him go, but as our hero was firm, at last they parted with a hundred protestations of good-will on both sides.

For a young camp, Cibola City was a very lively place after nightfall, and Goldlace had not far to go to find something worth inspection.

A hundred yards down the street was a Mexican ranch with a flashy sign, which announced that it was the "Golden Palace of Durango," and within was a genuine Mexican fandango in full blast.

The doors and windows were all open so that the passer-by in the street could have a full view of everything that transpired within.

As we have said, there was a strong Mexican faction in the town, and so the Golden Palace was as well supported as any "shebang" in the camp.

By the side of the house, and only some ten feet from it, was a little clump of bushes which had sprung up around a rock, and the idea occurred to the High Horse, when he noticed the circumstance, that by taking a seat upon the rock he would be partially concealed from observation, yet would have a good view of all that took place within the house.

"The gal would be 'bout eighteen, now, jest the age to enjoy a shin-dig," he mused, as he walked toward the rock. "The chances are big

that I will run across her in jest some sich place as this hyer, and I reckon I ought to be able to recognize her, if I am lucky enough to see her, by her resemblance to her mother. Ah, she was a right smart gal when she was going on eighteen, and it seems to me that I kin see her face rise out of the darkness afore me jest as plain as kin be. It will be a bitter reckoning for the man that wronged her when I call him to an account."

By this time he was seated upon the rock and was intently gazing through the open windows into the brilliantly-illuminated saloon, where some thirty-five or forty people were assembled, the men being largely in the majority.

There were some rather pretty girls in the place, for be it understood the Golden Palace was no low den, unfit for respectable women to visit, for among the Mexicans the fandango is an institution, and any lawlessness or vice is severely frowned upon, although, of course, with such a hot-headed, jealous people, quarrels will take place, over real or fancied injuries, when strong liquor is in and the wits are out.

Eagerly the watcher scanned the face of every woman in the room as they whirled past the window by which he was posted in the mazes of the dance; or when the measure was finished promenaded on their partners' arms to the bar at the further end of the apartment and partook of liquid refreshments, a light wine being kept at the Golden Palace for the express accommodation of the fair sex.

"Nary one on 'em is my mutton," murmured Goldlace, after he had carefully scanned the faces of every one of the girls. "Nary one on 'em look the least bit like the heifer I'm arter, worse luck!"

Just then footsteps sounded on his ears, the solid tread of a man, and the light rustle of a woman's dress.

The pair were coming toward the fandango hall in the same direction that the High Horse had followed, and as luck would have it they came to a halt for the purpose of holding a conversation about thirty feet from the clump of bushes where Goldlace had taken up his position and so, unwittingly, he became an eavesdropper.

"Tarry for a moment," said a deep, strong male voice, and the High Horse, peering through the bushes, saw that the man, who was a middle-aged, muscularly-built Mexican, rather flashily dressed, with a dark, stern and forbidding countenance, had laid his hand upon the arm of his companion and compelled her to halt.

The girl, for she was no more, not being out of her teens, was as beautiful and attractive a maiden as Goldlace had ever seen.

A perfect specimen of the peerless Mexican beauty, dark-haired, dark-eyed, perfect in form and with the willowy grace peculiar to the descendants of the proud old Spanish race.

"Wa-al, wa-al, ef she ain't a screamer you kin jest take my boots!" the High Horse muttered, fascinated by the beauty of the girl.

"I wish to come to an understanding with you before we enter the Golden Palace," the man continued, his voice as harsh and repellent as his face.

"Very well," and the sweet tones of the girl fell upon the ears of the listener like so many notes of music.

"A reg'lar bu'ster of a gal, and no mistake!" Goldlace murmured, softly, gazing at the lovely creature with all the eyes in his head.

"In the Golden Palace I expect to meet a certain gentleman—"

"Jose Camargo?" questioned the girl.

The man hesitated for a moment before he replied, and this afforded Goldlace an opportunity to mutter:

"Durn my cats! if that ain't the very identical cuss who invited himself to drink with me! Nice sort of a gen'leman he is for a splendiferous gal like that for to be going to meet."

"You are correct in your assumption that the gentleman whom I expect to meet is Jose Camargo, and the reason I speak about the matter is that I am not satisfied with your manner toward him."

A disdainful look appeared upon the face of the girl, and from the expression the listener jumped to the conclusion that the black-bearded Mexican did not stand high in the good graces of the lady.

"I have noticed for some time that you have acted in a very unfriendly way toward him, and I determined to speak to you about it, for you might as well understand that in the future Jose Camargo is to be your lord and master," the Mexican continued.

"Oh, no, not with my consent!" exclaimed the girl, hotly, her beautiful lips curling in superb disdain.

"Well, as far as I am concerned, it doesn't make the least bit of difference whether you consent or not, neither do I believe that Jose will trouble his head much over the matter," the man replied, coolly. "He and I have arranged the affair, and so long as you become his wife it doesn't matter the worth of a pin whether you like it or not."

"But I will never become his wife!" the girl exclaimed, haughtily.

"Oh, yes, you will. The matter is all settled and you cannot help yourself. I am your uncle, your only living relative, and your legal guardian. You are under age, and by our laws I am invested with the right to dispose of your fate. It does not matter whether you consent or not; that hasn't anything to do with it. You must marry Jose. You can judge how determined I am in this matter when I tell you I have spoken to the magistrate and made all arrangements for the ceremony. According to the laws of these North Americans almost any legally elected official can perform the ceremony, so I have arranged with the alcalde of the mining-camp of Red Flat to marry you. He is a Frenchman, an atrocious scoundrel, who will not hesitate at any crime so long as he is well paid for it. He understands all about the matter, and you may protest all you like, he will marry you just the same."

"Oh, this is monstrous!" exclaimed the maiden indignantly. "You will not dare to execute this fiendish scheme!"

"Will I not?" and the face of the Mexican became dark with rage. "You do not know me yet. Hitherto I have been mild and gentle with you, although it has tried me sorely so to act, for from your very childhood I have seen that you had a rooted aversion to me, and for no reason either, for I have never injured you."

"I know it, and I cannot explain why it is that I have always feared you, even from the very moment that my poor mother's death left me helpless in your hands, excepting that my instinct warned me that the time would come when you would cruelly persecute the orphan girl."

"Bah! that is the idle talk of a foolish child. I am helping you to a brave husband."

"A gambler—a cheat, a desperado, with the blood of many an innocent man upon his crime-stained soul!" the girl cried.

"Nothing of the kind!" the Mexican replied, quickly. "I grant ye that Jose has had a quarrel or two, when he has been obliged to stand up like a man, and in these struggles he has not been the one to suffer; but what would you have, a milksop for a husband, or a fine, bold fellow able to take his own part no matter how great the foe by whom he is assailed?"

"You cannot deceive me; your fine, bold fellow is a low, mean, paltry bravo, a cowardly assassin, ready to sell his knife to the highest bidder. You must not think I do not understand because for years you have kept me secluded in a lone ranch, isolated from all the world. Even in that lonely spot Heaven did not desert the orphan and sent friends who warned her of the dreadful fate which you had designed for her."

This intelligence, so entirely unexpected, roused the Mexican to a fearful pitch of anger.

"By all the saints!" he cried, "do you know, girl, you are risking your life by attempting to brave me? Another word of defiance and I swear I will strike you to my feet!"

But as he advanced upon the maiden with uplifted hand, the High Horse emerged from the bushes.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MEXICAN TRIES IT ON.

THE unexpected appearance of the listener astonished both the man and the girl, and exclamations broke from their lips.

The cry of the maiden had a joyous ring, for she fancied that the intruder came with friendly intent to rescue her from the cruel villain who threatened to inflict upon her the ignominy of a blow.

But the Mexican's exclamation was like the snarl of a wild beast when confronted by a foe who promised to prove dangerous.

"Hol' on, stranger! ain't you inclined to be a leetle onreasonable?" the new-comer asked, stepping forward until he came within easy reach of the other.

The Mexican was a man noted for his quick temper. With him it was a word and a blow, and the blow generally came first, and on this occasion the unexpected interference of the stranger roused him to fury immediately.

So incensed was he with the bold interloper that undoubtedly he would have flung himself instantly upon the man had he not been in a measure awed by his appearance.

The stranger looked as if he would prove a tough customer to handle, and the Mexican's prudence bade him restrain himself until he could ascertain what kind of a man was the new-comer.

"Caramba!" he cried, in his fiercest tones, "who called upon you to interfere in this business?"

"Wa-al, I reckon that no one invited me, if you come to that," the other replied, grinning in the face of the enraged "Greaser" in a very aggravating way.

"In that case, then, don't you think you had better face to the right-about and go off in quest of your own business?"

"Oh, but I reckon this hyer little matter is my business, lea tways, if I heerd the thing straight," the American retorted. "Mebbe you folks that come from the other side of the leetle creek that you call the Rio Grande don't under-

stand that on this hyer free soil we ain't apt to stand by and see a woman abused. It was jest by accident that I happened to hear you two a-talking. I was a-sort of resting myself in the bushes when you came up, so I couldn't help hearing, but, as it is, I own up I ain't a bit sorry that I did hear, 'cos it gives me a chance to prevent you from making a brute of yourself."

"Do you know who I am?" the Mexican demanded, fiercely, endeavoring to awe the stranger.

"Not much; I ain't the least bit acquainted in these parts, but I hope to be afore I'm mach older."

"My name is Javali—Estavan Javali, and those who know me think twice before they cross my path."

"Sho! I declare to gracious I never tunk once, let alone twice, but when I see'd you a-making out as if you was a-going to hit this gal I stepped right out, proud as a peacock and as savage as an old turkey gobbler; but then, you see, that was 'cause I ain't acquainted with you. You ought to carry a cuss around with you so that you could be introduced to strangers, then they would know enough to tumble to your leetle game and dust when you crooked your leetle finger at them."

The Mexican was puzzled. In all his experience on the border he had never met such another man as this.

He was no fool; the words seemed to imply that the stranger was making game of him, and yet the speaker was as grave as a judge.

"Take care!" he exclaimed, "I am not a man to jest with—I am dangerous when roused to anger. In this matter you have no right to interfere. This girl is my niece—I am her only living relative, her legal guardian—"

"But that don't go for to give you any right for to smack her jest as if she war a cowboy!" the other cried. "Durned nice kind of a h'ar-pin you are for to ever think of sich a thing! Cuss me, if I war you, if I wouldn't be ashamed to look even a mule in the face, to say nothing of a white man; but I kin tell you what it is, mister man, it's a lucky thing for you that you didn't allow your angry passions for to git the better on you, 'cos I reckon if you had struck this gal I would have been obliged to have climbed you for all I know how, 'cos I couldn't have stood by and see'd that, nohow you kin fix it!"

"The girl is mine, and by our laws I have a right to kill her if she denies me her obedience!" the Mexican cried, in a fury.

"Great yellow chief! you are on the wrong bank of the stream for to talk like that!" the other retorted. "I gently hinted 'bout that afore. This hyer is free side, and if it wasn't, no true American would stand by and see a woman injured. 'Sides, you're barking up the wrong tree in this matter, anyhow. I know the galoot you were speaking about, and the girl is right, every time! A meaner, black-muzzled, ugly-hearted son of a peraree-sarpint don't exist upon top of this hyer airth than this Jose Camargo, and your head is level, miss, in not wanting to have anything to do with him."

The Mexican had been watching the intruder with the utmost attention ever since he had made his appearance; at an early stage of the matter he had come to the conclusion that there was a good chance for a conflict between himself and the unknown, and being anxious to start with the advantage on his side, he was prolonging the conversation merely to throw the other off his guard, so that he might, in frontier parlance, get the "drop" on him.

And now he fancied the opportunity had arrived.

With a bitter oath he plucked forth his revolver from the holster where it reposed by his side.

But the man with whom he had to deal was no "tenderfoot,"—no greenhorn—to be thus easily taken at a disadvantage.

Apparently he had advanced with empty hands, but in reality he had a revolver in his right fist, held so it was concealed by his arm, and as this weapon was cocked and ready for action, he had the Mexican "covered" before the other could raise his weapon to the level, for it was but the work of a second for Goldlace to twist the pistol around and point it full at the breast of the "Greaser."

He had taken the precaution to cock the revolver before coming from his ambush, for he had been satisfied that the son of the land of Anahuac would not tamely brook his interference.

"Hol' on, hol' on!" Goldlace warned, "don't go for to fool with that shooting-iron or I'll have to make a cold corpus out of you. I should hate like thunder to do it, for, naturally, I'm jest as gentle as a kitten, but when I get riled I'm a reg'lar walkin' tornado, warranted to turn into a cyclone if I'm molested in any way, so you had better not rile me if you love the airth and hate the gentleman down below who is calculating to make it warm for you one of these days."

The Mexican came to an abrupt halt, his hostile intentions completely frustrated by the cunningness of his opponent.

There was considerable difference between attacking a man unprepared for war and an antagonist ready for battle.

That the stranger had the drop upon him there was no denying, and for the moment the Mexican was disconcerted.

He had been talking just for the purpose of throwing the American off his guard, so he could assail him with perfect safety, and to be so successfully outwitted at his own game was disgusting, to say the least.

All he could do under the circumstance was to stand and glare with rage at his adversary.

"Reg'lar surprise-party, ain't it?" the High Horse observed, enjoying the discomfiture of the other, "but this is the kind of shop where we deal in jest sich articles. If you don't see what you want, ask for it; revolvers constantly on tap; quarrelsome customers accommodated with pine coffins at the shortest notice. Say, hadn't you better put up that shooting-iron of yours? You better had, or I'll plug you so quick that you'll never know what hurt you!"

The Mexican had been taken at such a disadvantage that he had no choice but to obey, but it was with the most sullen air in the world that he thrust the revolver back in its holster.

"You have the best of me this time," he exclaimed, in a rage, "but when next we meet—"

"I reckon I'll try to accommodate you in about the same way," Goldlace interrupted, with a grin. "You'll find that I am the most accommodating chap that you ever struck since you was hatched."

"I'll have your heart's best blood some day for this!"

"In course! that's what I carry it around for! When any galoot under the mortal sun is hungry for fresh blood, jest send for me, and I'll fill him up so chock full that he'll think he's a slaughterhouse from the word go."

The girl, naturally, had shrunk from the Mexican when he had threatened her, so that she was almost within reach of the American, to whom she now stretched out her arms, imploringly.

"Oh, sir, do not put your life in peril on my account!" she cried. "You do not know this man as I know him. He is a very demon, and will not rest until he has injured you!"

Just at this moment two new actors appeared upon the scene.

Around the clump of bushes came the black-bearded desperado, Camargo, and his Indian ally, cocked revolvers in their hands.

From a distance they had evidently been attracted by the conversation, and had cautiously approached with the idea of taking the stranger by surprise.

"Oh, merciful heavens! you are lost!" cried the girl, sinking upon her knees in an agony of terror.

CHAPTER VIII. THREE TO ONE.

"OH, no, jest found!" ejaculated Goldlace, who could not resist the opportunity to get in a joke, no matter what the circumstances.

"Caramba! you are as welcome as the water in the desert to a parched traveler!" Javali exclaimed in fierce joy when he beheld this unexpected reinforcement. "Now, you North American beast! the advantage is not all on your side!"

It was a striking picture; the new-comers with their revolvers leveled directly at the stranger, and he, on his part, "covering" Javali with his weapon, while the girl knelt in an agony of terror, her hands clasped, the full, round moon above lending ample light to the scene.

"Reg'lar triangular affair, ain't it?" observed Goldlace, not in the least abashed by the circumstances. "You galoots have got the drop on me, and I've got the drop on this cuss, and I reckon Satan has got it in for us all, red-hot, and no mistake!"

"I told you we should meet again," Camargo remarked, with a sardonic smile, "although I did not dream that I should so soon hold you at a disadvantage."

"Did not the red chief say that he would have your heart to eat?" cried the savage; "not even one moon of life will you have."

"I reckon you are kind of rushing matters," Goldlace replied, evidently not in the least abashed by the position in which he found himself.

"Oho! you have met this dog before, then?" Javali exclaimed, astonished by the circumstance, and comprehending from what his allies had said that there had been trouble between them and the stranger.

"Oh, yes, we kinder scraped acquaintance an hour or so ago, but I declare to goodness I didn't expect to run afoul of them for a day or two, anyhow," Goldlace observed.

"It will cost you your life!" Camargo cried. "The red-man will drink your blood!" exclaimed the Indian.

"It will be sure to make you 'tarnal sick," Goldlace remarked, in the most matter-of-fact manner. "Try a leetle whisky straight instead; it will suit your stumjack a heap sight better."

"These gentlemen who have come so timely to my assistance are my bosom friends; you are in a trap, and if you have prayers to say you

had best be speedy and make your peace with Heaven before I give them the word to send you to the other world!" cried the old Mexican.

"Oh, but you won't do that," the High Horse remarked, perfectly cool and unconcerned.

"Why will I not?"

"Because I reckon you ain't anxious to go there yourself, are you?"

The Mexican uttered an exclamation of anger, and he displayed his fang-like teeth in a ferocious snarl. In his joy at the arrival of his allies he had not reflected that their presence did not in the least relieve him from the peril which menaced his life.

He was still covered by the revolver of the American, still in danger of immediate death.

"Aha!" Goldlace cried with a chuckle of satisfaction, guessing by the expression upon the face of the other that his words had recalled the Mexican to a sense of how grave was the situation as far as he was concerned. "You see, noble satrap, you ain't got so big a picnic of it as you might have. These two gentle galoots have arrived in time to avenge, but not to save you, if you insist upon war. They have got the drop on me, thar's no mistake 'bout that, but I've got you foul all the same."

"They kin plug me—in fact, give me a double-barreled plug, but while they air a-doing of it I reckon I'll settle your hash so completely that all that will be left for your pards to do will be to plant you in some cheerful spot, and shed a few briny tears over your grave. Mebbe they kin put up a tombstone with some neat and effective lines onto it. I'll give you an idea of the right kind of thing myself."

"Here lies"—lies is good, 'cos I reckon anybody that knows you will be apt to think that is appropriate—here lies the body of as noble a cuss as ever turned a jack from the bottom of the pack or slipped all the aces into his boot, a man who never took anything out of his reach, a sweet-scented Mexican cactus, cut down in the flower of his youth with his boots on, much to the disgust of the hangman, thus cheated out of a legitimate job."

"Caramba!" hissed Javali, almost beside himself with rage at this ludicrous description, "if I die, you will die also!"

"Thar's a heap o' satisfaction in that idee, a sight of consolation if you look at it in the right way," the High Horse remarked, reflectively, "and I reckon I'm ready whenever you are to take the leap in the dark. So, jest give the word and we'll let her rip!"

The Mexican set his teeth firmly together, mad with rage, as he gazed into the face of the undaunted American.

Despite the jesting way in which the other spoke he distinctly understood that he was thoroughly in earnest.

It was not the first time that the swarthy bravo had encountered one of the "mad North Americans," so reckless of life as to be ready to throw it away at a moment's notice.

As for the two who had, with the stealthy tread of tigers, crept to the assistance of their companion, they were puzzled and knew not what to do.

They thirsted for the blood of the man who had so cleverly beaten them at their own game, but since an attempt to destroy him would peril the life of their partner—for these three had traveled in companionship for some time—they hesitated, uncertain how to act.

"Oh, come, don't be all night about it!" Goldlace observed, impatiently. "Come up to the scratch and face the music like men and brothers. You pop me, I'll pop him, and if you don't upset my apple-cart at the first lick, I'll have a chance to give you a leaden pill apiece."

The stranger was clearly the master of the situation, despite the fact that the odds were against him, but then he was reckless, held life as cheap as though it could be had for the asking, while his antagonists, though desperate men, did not court certain death.

"Seel we'll give you your life!" cried Javali, abruptly, having come to the conclusion that the best way to get out of the matter was to allow the American to depart. "This time we spare you, but beware the next meeting; then one or both of us must fall."

"Going to try the clean back-down, eh?" cried the High Horse, in contempt. "Going to crawl right out of the deficklety? Wa-al, I swow, I thought you had more pluck! Oh, you fellers ain't got any sand—nary more backbone than an eel."

"Take your life and get out!" cried Javali, sternly, "and thank your lucky stars that we are not as crazy as you; but be warned, do not cross our path again, or it will surely cost you your life."

"And how 'bout this lady? Do you agree to treat her as a lady ought to be treated?" Goldlace inquired.

"Oh, do not think of me, generous stranger!" the girl exclaimed, rising to her feet, grateful tears shining in her dark eyes. "Depart and save the precious life which you so freely risked for a helpless woman."

"Not much!" the High Horse exclaimed. "I've kinder got into the protecting-helpless-female business since I struck this section of country, and I intend to see it through or bust!"

Say, you fellers air jest a-sp'iling for a fight with me, I know, but as you ain't eager to git wiped up, and want to sail in with all the advantages on your side, I'll tell you what I'll do. You're three to one, but I'll fight the hull b'ilin' on ye with my fists. All on us put our we'pons down onto the ground, and then we'll sail in, and if you kin wallop me, well and good; I'll take my gruel like a man, and never let a howl out of me."

Javali jumped eagerly at the proposal, for to him it seemed the height of folly for the American to believe that he could successfully contend against the three of them, but the other two remembering the example that they had had of the stranger's strength in the saloon, were not so sanguine.

Still, as Javali accepted the offer, they considered themselves in honor bound to try it on, for the dark-faced Mexican was the master-spirit of the three.

Down went the weapons to the ground. The American braced himself for the contest and invited his opponents to the attack.

"Hyer I am, as you may diskiver,
All the way from Roaring River,"

he chanted. "Hyer's the shop whar you're going to git your money's worth, and no mistake. Come for me, you no-souled, bow-legged, slab-sided, humble-backed heathen!"

And then there was a simultaneous rush of the three bravos upon the challenger.

The reception they met astounded even the two who had already experienced the American's strength.

With an open-handed cuff of his right hand he caught Javali on the side of his head and floored that individual as if he had been shot.

Another cuff sent Black Jose reeling over the earth like a drunken man, while the Indian who, with the guile of his race, had essayed to take the stranger at a disadvantage by dropping and seizing him around the legs, was, with a powerful kick, sent whirling over the ground like a football.

The battle was ended, for none of the attackers wanted any more.

"Now you have been threatening me pretty lively, jest listen while I blow my horn. If I hear of any of you molesting the lady, I'll jest wipe the airth with the man that does it, so mind your p's and q's!" and then, with a polite bow to the lady, the High Horse sauntered away.

CHAPTER IX.

A NOVELTY.

CIBOLO CITY had a great deal to talk about on the day that succeeded the one on which had occurred the events related in our preceding chapters.

The advent of the stranger and the remarkable feats of strength which he had performed so easily, was the general topic of conversation.

His exploit in the saloon of the Great American Eagle Hotel of course was common property, for twenty pair of eyes had witnessed his triumph over the pair of desperadoes, and the men of the mining-camp had wondered greatly thereat, for the black-bearded Mexican and his Indian pard were reputed to be two of the toughest men in the town.

His second encounter with the pair and the exceedingly skillful manner in which he had knocked them out of time, even though assisted by their redoubtable chief, Estavan Javali, commonly believed to be one of the most dangerous men in the region, for to the bull-dog courage of Black Jose he added brains and learning, was not known to the public at large, for Javali and his pards were not men who wore their "hearts upon their sleeves" and perambulated the town airing their griefs, but they felt exceedingly sore over the matter, all the same, and after the affair was over and they had retreated to their chosen haunt, they swore a fearful oath that they would not rest contented until they had full measure of revenge upon the bold stranger who had dared to handle them in such an unceremonious manner.

That it was not a light task they understood full well, for they realized that the stranger was no common adversary.

Twice, single-handed, he had encountered them, and on the second occasion, when he had tried his strength again't the three, his victory was, if anything, more complete than on the first trial, when only two opposed him.

The confederates came to the conclusion that to score a victory over the stranger underhand means must be tried.

Twice they had faced him in open contest, and twice been most soundly thrashed.

And as Javali declared in conclusion, after the matter had been thoroughly discussed by the three:

"The only way to get the best of this fellow is to take him at a disadvantage, so that he will not have a chance for his life. We must rid the town of him, my braves, or else get out ourselves, for I tell you the camp is not big enough to hold all of us."

The others fully agreed with the speaker, and in great draughts of fiery liquor they drank to the death of the High Horse and pledged them-

selves to accomplish it before another moon had waned.

As for the Samson-like Californian, he hardly gave the pards a second thought, excepting that upon his return to the hotel some kindly souls took it upon themselves to warn him of the danger to which he had exposed himself by getting into a quarrel with the red and yellow pards, two of the most dangerous men in the territory, as they solemnly assured him.

"I ain't a-going 'round with a chip onto my shoulder looking for a fight," Goldlace replied, "but I tell you what it is, gentlemen, dangerous or not, I don't allow any man to ring in on a drink at my expense. If any gerlout tries that raffle on me thar'll be trouble, if he's as big as the side of a house. That's my platform, and I don't care a continental who knows it!"

The reader will understand that it was not a wonder when the news of the encounter in which the High Horse had so easily vanquished the bravos became the common property of the town that there was a great deal of talk excited and almost every man in the place conceived it to be his duty to make a pilgrimage to the Great American Eagle Hotel that he might feast his eyes upon the person of the stranger, who had performed the greatest feat of arms that the camp had ever witnessed.

And as each and every man took one or more drinks at the bar, so as to have a chance to interview the worthy German upon the subject, the exchequer of the hotel waxed full; much to the delight of Dutch Jake, although he became hoarse in relating the story of the exploit.

In fact there isn't any doubt that he would have been laid upon a sick-bed, "talked to death," if the gallant major had not come to his assistance.

"I'll tell you the yarn," he would exclaim, after a couple of hours were over, and Jake, completely done up as far as talking was concerned shook his head in dismay when some eager searcher after knowledge "wanted to know," how it was 'bout the fight in which the stranger got away with the two best men in the town.

Cibolo City had been a lively town ever since the time when the first band of prospecting pilgrims had trooped into the region and finding that the "color" was good set about building up a city that in time should make San Francisco, Denver, Pueblo, and the rest of the mushroom towns sick with grievous envy.

It took a great deal to astonish the average citizen of the camp, and remarkable as had been the feat performed by the stranger, the town at large regarded it as nothing really extraordinary, because the atmosphere of the camp was so developing in its tendencies that if a man had anything in him Cibolo City was sure to bring it out.

It was the creed of the camp that a Cibolo Cityite ought not to be astonished at anything that might happen.

But though the inhabitants manfully endeavored not to appear wonder-struck with the exploit of the modern Samson, and really succeeded very well, yet, on the day following the night on which the High Horse made his appearance an incident happened that caused the whole town to gape with wonder, despite their boasts that they were people whom nothing could amaze.

At eight o'clock in the morning, just as the camp had fairly waked up, partaken of the early "cocktail," and prepared to settle down for the business of the day, a young and pretty girl, oddly attired, made her appearance in the main street of the camp, carrying a common wooden chair over her shoulder, while suspended by a strap from her right hand was a candle-box with an oblong block of wood fastened to the top.

She was dressed in a sort of a Bloomer costume, made of blue-flannel, severely plain, for there wasn't the least bit of trimming on it, but quite picturesque and very becoming.

Her shapely little head was surmounted by a white felt hat and altogether she was really a revelation to the town.

The men of the camp could not have stared more if the new-comer had been a ghost from the other world.

Who was she, marching along the street with as much composure as though she did not know that she was attracting universal attention?

Why was she "toting" the chair and what was she going to do with the candle-box, rigged up in such a peculiar fashion?

With all their smartness this conundrum was too much for the guessers, and they gave it up.

"I'll never tell you!" responded Kentucky Dan, the noted horse-jockey, when interrogated as to the meaning of the strange sight.

He was questioned on account of being not only the best guesser in the town, but because his usual custom was to back up his surmises with the "solid stuff."

"Wind is cheap but it takes money to buy land," was his favorite remark.

When Kentucky Dan gave the riddle up—the best judge of a horse that ever stepped in shoe-

leather, and horses and women in the popular mind are usually supposed to be closely related, both being costly pieces of property, extremely difficult to manage at times, and inclined to be very unreliable, the camp at large refrained from further questioning.

Soon the mystery was made plain.

The girl halted in front of the Great American Eagle Hotel, placed the chair at one side of the building, so that it was shielded from the rays of the sun, now coming up full in all its glory, set down the box in front of the chair, lifted the cover, took out a box of blacking and a pair of blacking-brushes, together with a small sign, neatly painted on a piece of cotton cloth, which by the aid of some tacks she affixed to the wall of the hotel.

The wondering lookers-on read:

"BOOTS BLACKED.

"A FIRST-CLASS SHINE FOR 25 CENTS.

"POSIE MCKINNEY."

Sure enough it was the little girl whom the Californian had rescued from the tyranny of the red-bearded Irishman, and who, starting in the world on her own account, had chosen this strange occupation, hoping thereby to gain an honest living.

It was a remarkable position for a young girl, but Posie was one of the stuff of which heroes are made and she faced the wondering eyes of the gaping crowd with perfect composure.

She had nerved herself for the ordeal and now that the trial was made, and she found herself facing the staring throng, attracted by the sight of a female bootblack, she discovered that really the position was not so unpleasant as she had expected.

The most astonished man in the town was the proprietor of the hotel, honest Dutch Jake, when he was informed of the strange woman who had taken refuge under the eaves of his hostelry.

"Vot ish dot?" he cried, his English worse than usual. "I goes me mine house out and put a leetle stop to dot foolishness!"

CHAPTER X.

THE DUTCHMAN OBJECTS.

THE Dutchman hurried forth in a great flurry, closely followed by the veteran, Major Bum, who, dropping into the saloon in quest of his morning cocktail, had informed the saloon-keeper of the strange sight which could be witnessed without his walls.

And in a spirit of mischief the major had gravely told the easily-bothered Dutchman that he had better put a stop to the matter or else his customers would be apt to go to some other saloon.

"Kinder looks as if you were sliding into a sort of a dance-house shebang—House of Blazes style, you know," the major suggested, taking advantage of the confusion into which the announcement threw the German to swallow his cocktail without showing the color of his money.

Jacob had made up his mind that once for all he would put a stop to the major's nonsense, and had intended to hold on to the glass in which he had placed the nerve-quieting compound until the man of cheek "forked over the collateral," but the major profited by the fit of astonishment into which the announcement of the female bootblack threw the saloon-keeper to dextrously withdraw the glass from his clutch, and so skillfully did he manage the matter that the cocktail was safely down the capacious gullet of the major before Jacob comprehended that for a'out the thousandth time the veteran beat had been too much for him and had succeeded in getting his morning dram without going through the ceremony of paying for it.

"How was dot, major?" Jacob asked, suddenly awaking to a consciousness of the situation as he saw the liquor disappear and heard it gurgle down the thirsty throat of the other, and to the Dutchman's fancy the throttle seemed to sizzle as if it was red hot.

"Bully!" exclaimed the veteran, emphatically, pretending to think that the saloon-keeper was inquiring about the drink; "just first-class, old man, and you can bet your life on it every time! I'm willing to back you, Jacob, against any man in Texas, bar none, for mixing a cocktail fit for a gentleman to tickle his throat with and no mistake! I always make a point of sending all the strangers I run across into your place, and I tell you, Jake, a word from a man like myself, universally acknowledged to be as good a judge of liquor as there is west of the Mississippi, goes a great ways. Now if I had a spite against you I could do you a great deal of damage on the quiet."

"I could work it so that your business would fall off—you wouldn't reach what you take now by fifty dollars a day, and that would be forty a day, clean profit, out of your pocket."

"A man gifted with the art of oratory can make things hum when he sets out to make a spoon or spile a horn."

"And, Jake, seeing that that cocktail was really 'way above the mark—a sort of a nectar

fit for the gods—you can make me another," then the major leaned over the bar with both elbows upon it and winked significantly at the now irate German.

Jacob had gotten his "Dutch" up, however, and he did not intend to stand any more nonsense.

"Anodder cocktail you put yourself inside-out of, hey?" he queried.

"That's my platform! now you do hit me whar I live! ha, ha, ha!" chuckled the veteran.

"Nein!"

"Oh, no, not nine, Jake, my festive rooster; I couldn't go nine of 'em, you know," the major replied, unable to resist the temptation of getting off the old joke. "Sich bliss would be too much for one poor mortal to tackle. One is enough, bully rook, but make her strong enough to take all the hair off a yaller dog!"

"Major, you ish a pully gustomer!" exclaimed the Dutchman, in bitter sarcasm.

"Oh, you bet! and I'll stick to you, too! You needn't be afraid about *that*, and I reckon I kin hold as much liquor as any other two-legged galoot in the camp," the other replied, cocking his well-worn hat upon one side of his head and assuming a knowing air as he leered at Jacob.

"Dot ish all right. Der liquor goes into you as easy as de log sliding off mit der poy, but der gelt—der money—how was dot for high? See me mit a quarter, queek!" and the speaker held out a fat palm, and tapped it with the forefinger of the other hand in an extremely significant manner.

"A quarter! What for?" and the expression of amazement that the veteran beat assumed was really artistic.

"You hafe not me for dot cocktail paid!" exclaimed the saloon-keeper, indignantly.

"What of it?" the major demanded, in a still higher key. "Do you think I don't know it? What on earth do you take me for? I'm a gentleman, I am, one of the clean, white stripe, and don't you forget it! That's all right! You never catch me going back on a thing of that kind. Jest chalk it down for the present and I will fix it up square to-morrow, together with two or three little things of the kind that I owe you. You bet I remember all these circumstances. Let me whisper to you, Dutchy," and the major leaned over the counter in a mysterious way and brought his lips close to the ear of the others. "One of my mines, you know, the Rip Roarer claim—'tain't worth a cuss: plenty of ore, but cost so much to get it out that it would bust a concern like the Bank of England for to attempt to run it—a Greaser greenhorn—cattle—cowboy feller, you know—lots of ducats—eager to invest—stick him on the Rip Roarer—strike him for fifty thousand in clean cash if I get a cent. Don't say a word until I close the matter—breathe not a whisper even to your dearest friend. Dutchy, we'll take a drink to the Rip Roarer!"

And the major incontinently seized upon the whisky-bottle and a couple of glasses which the saloon-keeper had incautiously left within the major's reach, and before the amazed Jacob could interfere he had poured out two liberal "horns" of liquor.

"Rip Roarer and down she goes!" and the major drained his glass with gusto.

The Dutchman, although perfectly well satisfied that the mine, the Mexican and the bargain existed only in the imagination of the champion beat, yet was so fascinated by his eloquence that he yielded as usual and drank to the success of the trade just as if he believed the yarn to be Gospel truth.

"I'll fix everything up to-morrow; you can depend upon that, and if I shouldn't happen to think of it you must be sure to jog my memory, remind me of it, you know."

"You shust bet mine boots I will!" Jacob remarked, emphatically.

"But now, really, you ought to see about this girl bootblack. Jake, old feller! I'm afraid that some one has put up a job on you. Some galoot, envious of the prosperity of your saloon, has hired the girl to open out right alongside of your place so as to give it a bad name."

Jacob was not in a good humor, for he felt disgusted with himself for allowing the major to pull the wool over his eyes in such an easy way; so, leaving his place in charge of his assistant, he rushed out into the street, determined to make the girl bootblack vacate her position in short order.

There was quite a little crowd collected, twenty-five or thirty people, all staring at the girl as though she was some kind of a rare wild beast instead of a young and pretty woman.

In fact the majority of the lookers-on thought that the girl must surely be insane or else she would never have dreamed of setting up such a useless trade in that wild region, where a man who sported a boiled shirt and a pair of polished boots was regarded as a dandy of the first water.

The girl had seated herself in the chair, and was waiting for the first customer to make his appearance with the utmost patience, and when the irate fat Dutchman came tearing out of the saloon and made directly for her, she fancied the wished-for customer had arrived, never no-

ting, owing to the novelty of her position, the look of anger which still further inflamed the always red face of the presiding genius of the great American Eagle Hotel.

"Black your boots, sir!" she asked, with a seductive smile, as she rose at his approach, and the manner of her greeting was so captivating, that the hands of at least a dozen in the crowd went down for their wealth to see if they couldn't scare up a two-bit piece so that they might have a chance to chip into the novel game.

"Black mine boots!" cried the Dutchman, looking down at the extremely large leather "packages," almost red from long wear and lack of polish, which covered his enormous feet.

"Don't you do it, miss, unless he makes a contract with you to supply the blacking," Kentucky suggested, the veteran sportsman happening to come upon the scene just at that moment.

"Why, miss, it would be a losing job for you, for I'm open to bet anything from a horse to a hen that it will take about a dozen boxes to make those gun-boats of his look anyway decent. I know the shoemaker that built those boots, gentlemen, and he assured me upon his word of honor as a leather butcher, that it took the hides of four steers to fill the contract."

"You don't like mine boots, mebbe!" cried Jake, annoyed, for his feet were his sensitive point. "I tole you vat it ish, mine fr'end, dose boots are goot boots. You no like dem boots, you kin eat dem boots, queek, bet you! By shiminetty gracious! dot vas de kind of jack rabbit I vash!"

A roar of laughter from the bystanders greeted this rejoinder, delivered by the angry saloon-keeper, accompanied by abundant gesticulation.

"Oh, no, not for a thousand dollars!" replied Kentucky in the most serious manner possible. "I can eat almost anything, but I must draw the line at a Dutchman's boots. Not any of it in mine, thank you!"

"I don't vant no blacking mit mine boots, but young vomans, I vant you to go queek away from mine house out. You makes me too mooch droubles!" the saloon-keeper cried, angrily, to the girl. "Vat for you dakes mine house? You tink it vas a bangshe, or a blace vere dey go mit a dig-shin? Nein! Go vay!"

"Oh, no, I'm not doing you any hurt, nor your hotel either, if I have my sign tacked on your wall," the girl replied, spiritedly. "I'm willing to do the fair thing: if you'll let me stay here, I'll black your boots every morning and I won't charge you a cent!"

"Nein! Go vay, or I kick me the stuffing from dat chair so queek as never vash!" Jake exclaimed, approaching with threatening gestures.

The girl retreated in dismay; but then, suddenly, upon the scene appeared the tall form of the High Horse.

"Hold your horses, Dutchy!" he cried. "Don't touch my pard, that rip-staving old chair, or there'll be a fuss!"

CHAPTER XI.

THE FIRST CUSTOMER.

"Vot ish dot?" cried the saloon-keeper, recognizing the stranger in an instant and pausing in his advance.

"Vot ish dot?" exclaimed Goldlace, imitating the Dutchman so exactly that it brought a broad grin upon the faces of the bystanders. "What kind of a lingo is that to spit out in a Christian land? Why don't you speak plain United States language, you heathen foreigner?"

This was assailing Jacob in his tenderest place; above all things he prided himself upon the fact that he spoke the language of his adopted country with such exactness that no one would ever take him to be anything but an American.

"Dunder and blixen!" he howled; "vot for you makes foolishness mit me in dot way? I can de English speak so goot as never vas!"

"You kin?"

"You bet your boots on dot! You hear mit me? Dot vas der kind of a snakerattle I am, all de v'ile!" Jacob replied, proudly.

"You speak English! Do you call that double-jointed, broken-backed stuff English? Bah! Why, I've got an old white mule out in the corral yonder that kin make a better fist at it! But we'll let that pass, and come right down to business—old solid business, too, every time."

"If this hyer two ears of mine didn't go back on me, I heerd you howl that you were going to kick the stuffing out of this hyer chair, and, gentle benzine-h'ister, I want you to understand that this hyer chair is an old side-partner of mine, and I reckon that while I am able to stand on two legs I sha'n't see that aged article of furniture abused."

"Old hoss, that cheer has been as near to me as a brother—never went back on me ary time, but was allers ready and willing to do its level best and durn the expense. Pard, you have got to apologize to thet air cheer!"

"Vot ish dot?" and the Dutchman stared open-mouthed at the eccentric stranger.

"Pologize to the cheer—say you're sorry for having said anything that might have hurt its feelings—that you didn't know it was sich a whole-souled piece of furniture, and you take everything back in regard to kicking the stuffing out of it."

"Oh, you makes foolishness mit me!" the other exclaimed, in disgust.

"Do I? Do you see that, you swelled out lager-beer keg?" and Goldlace whipped out one of his revolvers, cocked the weapon and then shoved it right under the nose of the now affrighted saloon-keeper.

"Mine gootness, be careful mit dot, mine friend!" the sorely-alarmed Dutchman implored.

"Say that you're sorry, or I'll drive in the bung and let out the lager!" the High Horse threatened.

"Mine gracious, yes, so sorry as never vas!"

"Now sit down in the cheer and see what a nice comfortable seat it is."

The alacrity with which the saloon-keeper complied was wonderful.

"As I understand the game, miss, this hyer fat lump of sauerkraut is kinder sort of a landlord of yourn?" Goldlace remarked, addressing the girl.

"Yes, sir, I suppose so; I presume that I am on his ground; and, anyway, I've got my sign tacked up on the side of his house," she replied.

She had not forgotten the stranger who had come so timely to her assistance in the old house on the trail, and now gratitude for this new service, so delicately rendered, shone in her eyes.

"Mighty big thing for him, too," the High Horse remarked. "He'll appreciate it in time, arter he gits used to it. You see, miss, it takes these foreigners a long time to get anything through their wool."

Jacob groaned at this fresh insult, but he was in too much awe of the revolver, which still threatened him, to put his remonstrance into words.

"And if I've got the lay-out down as fine as I think I have, I reckon I heerd you offer for to black his boots every morning, provided he agreed to let you keep your position hyer?"

"Yes, sir; I thought that would be about right," Posie replied.

"Heap sight more than right!" Goldlace exclaimed, assuming an indignant air. "Why, little gal, if you should make any such trade as that, this p'ison-juggler porpoise would git his big paws on all the profits of the business! No, sir-ee! that ain't a squar' thing, nohow you kin fix it. If you blacked his boots once a week, say every Saturday afternoon, so as to fix him up like a gentleman for Sunday, he could consider himself mighty well paid."

"Vot foolishness is dot?" cried Jacob.

"If you ain't satisfied with that arrangement, you double-distilled essence of beer and sauerkraut, I'm willing to leave it to the crowd," the Californian replied. "Say, boys, ain't I giving Dutchy the squarest kind of a deal?" and Goldlace appealed to the bystanders.

The "boys" were unanimous in the opinion that the saloon-keeper had no reason to complain, and Kentucky even went so far as to remark that he "reckoned" all the advantages were on the side of the landlord of the Great American Eagle Hotel.

"I think that Dutchy ought to pay the lady something, for I regard it as a decided advantage for him to have such an establishment under the eaves of his hostelry. If he's the kind of man that I take him to be, he'll be willing to come down handsomely for the privilege."

"Mine gootness! you makes chokes mit me!" protested Jacob, who did not at all relish the turn that the conversation was taking.

"Oh, I don't want him to pay me anything!" the girl interposed. "All I wish is for him to be willing I should stay here, for it is the best spot in all the camp for me, and I am ready to do anything that is fair and right about the matter."

"Oh, he's willing—he's jest a-dying for to have you stay—he'd never forgive himself if you should take it into your head to go away, eh, Dutchy?" and the High Horse flourished the revolver in an extremely significant way before the eyes of the bewildered saloon-keeper.

"By shiminetty gracious! dot vas de kind of mans I am!" Jacob declared, in deadly terror for fear the Californian might take it into his head to do him a mischief.

"Thar! didn't I tell you so? It's all right, miss; your lease is signed; now all you've got to do is to fix the first week's rent!" exclaimed Goldlace. "Shine him up, miss, and astonish the weak nerves of them butes, that have never known what it is to even smell of blacking since they came out of the car shop."

But the discomfited Dutchman was not at all disposed to sit quiet and have his boots polished, and at the same time be the target for all sorts of remarks, more or less witty, from the bystanders enjoying the joke.

"Nein! Dot gal can stay mit der house out all she bleases. Dot is all right, but der boots are blenty goot as dey are."

And he rose in his chair, red with rage. "Sit down!" commanded Goldlace, and the leveled revolver emphasized the order.

A look of blank dismay came over the face of the saloon-keeper, and he sunk back into the chair with a celerity that was wonderful.

"You're going to have your butes blacked, and don't you furgit it!" the Californian announced. "And it sha'n't cost you a cent, either. Now, miss, go right ahead with the funeral!"

The girl could hardly keep from laughing as she set to work upon the huge cowhides of the dismayed Dutchman, who leaned back in the chair, a perfect picture of misery, as, with staring eyes, he looked into the muzzle of the revolver by means of which the stranger had "persuaded" him to submit to the operation.

The girl was not particularly expert with the brushes, but what she lacked in experience she made up in willingness, and in about five minutes she succeeded in working a remarkable transformation in the appearance of the Dutchman's foot-gear.

The bystanders all the while keeping up a running fire of badinage at the expense of the victim, for so Jacob considered himself, but one and all were careful not to say anything to wound the feelings of the girl, not only because about all of them understood that the High Horse would not be apt to stand tamely by and see her made the butt of ridicule, but there was a great deal of chivalric feeling in the breasts of these rough fellows, all of whom admired her spunk in endeavoring to get a living even in this odd way.

In such a camp as Cibola City the avenues by which a lone and unprotected woman could hope to secure a respectable livelihood were few and far between, provided that she depended upon honest labor for her sustenance.

CHAPTER XII.

POSIE EXPLAINS.

"ALL through, sir," said the girl, when the job was completed.

Jacob did not stir, but looked at Goldlace as if asking permission to get up.

"You kin h'ist jest as soon as yer legs will let yer," the High Horse remarked, putting down the hammer of his revolver, and replacing the weapon in its holster. "You have acted like a born gentleman, Dutchy. I never saw a man go through the fearful operation of getting his butes blacked with greater courage in my life.

"If this hyer camp ain't got an alcalde, and they are looking after a critter with the real Simon-pure grit, able to stand up to the rack and take his gruel like a man, you're the cuss that I would nominate for the office quicker than a blind mule would kick a lame grasshopper off his thumb-hand side ear."

Jacob grinned a sickly smile.

"You was a funny mans," he said, but by chiminetty gracious! you vas not de kind of man dot I would dake mid me for a blaything."

"Right you are, me gentle Dutchman, yet thar's a heap of fun in me if you draw me out the right way."

Then he turned to the girl, while Jacob improved the opportunity to retreat to his saloon.

"Now, miss, since I have had the pleasure of procuring you your first customer, will you allow me the honor of being your second?"

"I ain't had my gunboats shined up for a month of Sundays, and I should really like to see how it feels to go 'round with my boots blacked like a first-class gen'leman."

"I shall only be too glad, sir, to wait upon you," the girl answered, a grateful smile upon her bright young face.

So Goldlace seated himself in the chair, and the girl set to work.

By this time the novelty of the girl boot-black had begun to wear off, and the knot of bystanders slowly dispersed. Only Major Bum and a couple of more "gentlemen of leisure" of his stamp—men who were never known to have any business to occupy their minds outside of their regular avocation of obtaining liquor and food without paying for the afore-said—lingered near; and they stayed for business as well as pleasure, too, for each one of the three had secretly made up his mind to enjoy the luxury of a shine, and one and all were cudgeling their brains how to arrive at the desired result without going through the plebeian and vulgar process of paying for it.

The major was by far the most adroit of the three, for the other two were only common vagabonds known respectively as Howling Mike and Lager Hans.

As their names indicated, the first was an Irishman, and the second claimed a German descent.

Both were creatures of inferior wits, totally dissimilar in appearance, the Irishman being tall and thin, while the other was short and fat, but extremely alike in their contempt for work.

They managed to pick up a living by cleaning out the saloons; and by industriously hanging around them, always ready to rush to the bar at the smallest hint, they succeeded in keep-

ing pretty well filled with liquor about all the time.

It was a custom among the miners when they came to town after making a successful strike to "set 'em 'up" for the boys, and all within the sound of their voices were welcome to drink at the expense of the prosperous men.

That the major, who, despite the hard times which he occasionally saw, managed to preserve an appearance of gentility, shabby though it was, should desire to avail himself of the skill of the female bootblack was not to be wondered at, but that the other worthless hummers should so aspire aroused the major's wrath, for with the keen instinct of genius he had suspected the desire which had grown up in their minds by the covert why in which they surveyed their boots and then glanced longingly in the direction of the girl.

The other two had also come to the conclusion that the major had an eye in this direction and the result was that the three favored each other with looks expressive of the highest contempt.

The lookers-on were at some little distance so that Goldlace had an opportunity to exchange a few words with the girl without being overheard.

"What on earth put it into your head to try this sort of a dodge?" he asked, as she worked industriously at his 'boots, which were sadly in need of such care.

"It was the only thing which seemed to promise me any chance of a living," Posie replied. "If you remember, I told you I had a friend in this camp, an honest, hard-working woman, who, having lost her husband, managed to support herself by doing washing, or any work she could get. I thought that there might be a chance for me, and as I'm a good sewer, I expected to pick up a little in that way. But my friend totally discouraged my plan. She said she knew I wouldn't be able to get work enough to keep me alive, for she, a strong, hearty woman, able to do all kinds of hard work, had a terrible struggle to keep the wolf from the door.

"It did not take me long to find out that she believed I had done a very foolish thing in leaving my step-father, and was like a great many supposed friends in this life, who are profuse in offers of service when you can't possibly accept, yet when the time comes when you need a friend's assistance, they discover that they are not in condition to be of any service to you. It was this way with this woman.

"She has told me a hundred times that my step-father was a perfect brute and that I was a great idiot to remain with him and submit to his ill-treatment, and that if she was me she wouldn't stand such usage for a single day.

"If it hadn't been for her talk I don't suppose I would have ever summoned up courage enough to come away, and I tell you, sir, I was angry enough when I found that the woman was frightened at the result of her advice and thought I ought to go back.

"The fact is, she was afraid that my step-father would come after me, and if he found me at her house it would make trouble for her, for she did not believe me when I told her that a stranger had interfered in my behalf and given Turk such a thrashing as he had never received before in all his life. I was desperate, for I knew not which way to turn, and then the wild idea came into my head to set up as a boot-black. I had a few dollars which I had saved, enough to get the stuff to make this dress and to get my brushes and blacking.

"I knew that the endeavor was a sort of a forlorn hope, but then in this queer country no one can ever tell what will pay. I remember how they all laughed when a wandering barber came along and set up shop at Fort Quitman.

"Everybody said he would surely starve to death, because hardly any one took the trouble to shave, but the prophets were all wrong, for the barber did a good business, right from the start."

"You're right thar, sisie; it's a mighty queer country, and you can't 'most always generally tell what is going to happen," Goldlace observed. "I shouldn't be surprised if you made out right well. Anyhow hyer's one customer you can count on as reg'lar as the day breaks!"

"Oh, thank you, sir! You have been so good to me that I am sadly afraid I never will be able to repay your kindness!" the girl exclaimed, the speech evidently coming straight from her heart.

"Don't really know how to thank me, eh?"

"No, sir; indeed I do not."

"Wa-al, if you don't know how, don't try," and then the High Horse laughed merrily at his own joke. "The fact is, since I have struck this region I have kinder gone in as a protector of helpless gals, and, as far as I've got, I must say I like the business."

By this time the boots were finished, and Goldlace rising surveyed them complacently.

"By the dancing bear of Mariposa! that is what I call a first-class job, though, I say, don't it strike you that it looks a leetle queer for the feet to be black and shining fit to see yer face

in, while the legs are brown as an Injun's hide?"

"Yes, I suppose all of the boots ought to be polished by rights," the girl observed doubtfully.

"I reckon if you attempted *that* job you would have a mighty big contract on hand, or on the feet, jest as you choose to call it," Goldlace observed, with another good-natured grin.

"Oh, I'll do it, sir, and gladly!" Posie hastened to exclaim.

"No you won't, nary time! Much obliged, all the same! They look fu'st-rate; I'm a queer fish anyhow, and like queer things. Tha'r' odd, and that jest suits a gentleman 'bout my size. Hyer's your coin!"

And he put a five-dollar gold-piece into her hand.

"But I haven't any change, sir."

"Change! Who in thunder said anything 'bout change? Keep it all, you smart leetle woman, two bits for the shine, and the rest to feed the birds with!"

CHAPTER XIII.

THE THUMPER FROM THUMPERTOWN.

"HAW, haw, haw!" roared Major Bum, his fancy tickled by the odd expression of the stranger, "I hope you will excuse my smiling, but I'm durned if you don't beat the deck!"

"Smiling!" exclaimed Goldlace, "do you call that smiling, he-hawing like a spavined mule? If *that* is your way of smiling I should want to be excused from being 'round when you take it into your head to laugh. Dog-gone my cats! if I don't believe that it would be worse than an earthquake!"

Of the three bummers, who had suddenly become possessed of the insane idea to have their boots blacked, the major was the only one who had an idea of how the little operation could be arranged without putting them to the disagreeable necessity of paying for it, for all three agreed with ancient Pistol, Shakespeare's famous vagrant,

"Base is the slave that pays!"

The stranger was very free with his money, apparently was rolling in wealth, and the major believed that if he was properly approached his acquaintance would be valuable to the enterprising citizen shrewd enough to fasten himself upon him, and the veteran thought he was just the man to fill the bill.

"You kin mash me up into apple fritters if you don't jest take the cake. Yes, sir-ee! you capture the hull durned bakery! Say, you must come and take a drink with me on the strength of that air joke of yourn. You kin bet your bottom dollar that it's the best thing that has been said in this town for a mighty long time. I reckon I'll have to open a bottle of wine on it. Oh, it's a big thing and no mistake!"

"I perceive that you are a gen'leman, and no doubt a judge of good whisky," Goldlace replied, with a bow which the other instantly returned in the most profound and elaborate manner; "and I must say that I hain't seen a man since I struck this camp that I would sooner drink with than your royal nibs, and I reckon these gen'lemen won't object to jine in the funeral."

Howling Mike and Lager Hans at once seized upon the opportunity to protest that there wasn't anything in the world would give them greater pleasure, and with great gusto they smacked their eager lips at the prospect of the coming treat.

"But I say, pardners," continued Goldlace, "ain't you going to give the girl a show? Come, walk up like men, slap down your two-bit pieces and git your gunboats polished, so that you kin use 'em for looking-glasses to see your own handsome countenances."

"Jest exactly wot I was a-going to do!" assented the major, with a lordly air, waving his hand as if he owned the whole town, and the other two, emulous of his boldness, and fully believing, notwithstanding they knew the man so well, that he really was going to have his boots blacked at his own expense, went down in their various pockets in the forlorn hope that there might be a stray two-bit piece hidden away in some corner.

"But"—and here the major made a dead pause, shook his head, and then winked knowingly at the other—"you know how it is sometimes, yourself, I suppose? Jest now it is the last of the month; my remittances—my leetle income from my various properties—do not come in until about the first Saturday in the month, and as they arrive jest as reg'larly as clockwork, I never hold any money back, but jest spend it as freely as so much water, and so, by this time in the month, I am generally clean bu'sted; not that it makes any difference hyer, you bet! whar I'm known, and whar my word is jest as good as my bond—"

"Of course, I understand!" interrupted Goldlace, "and I don't doubt thar isn't a man in the town who wouldn't jest as lief have one as the other."

"Stranger, if you owned the hull State of Texas, you would be perfectly safe in betting on that!" the major averred, proudly.

"I don't doubt it a mite; but, gen'lemen, I'm going to stand treat on this boot-blackening business, or I'll go half-way, anyhow, jest to encourage the leetle gal, so walk up!"

Not one of the three waited for a second invitation, but they rushed toward the girl with so little regard for each other that they came together in a heap at the chair, and as all three couldn't sit upon it at the same time, which was a feat that they attempted, over it they went sprawling upon the ground, after having knocked their heads together pretty severely.

Then they sat up and scowled at each other.

"Be the howly smoke, it's cracked my skull ye have, ye murtherin' blaggard!" exclaimed the Irishman, rubbing his head ruefully.

"Dunder and blixen! vot for you t'ink I am?" cried Hans, whom the major had butted in the jaw with force sufficient to make him think all his teeth were loosened. "You makes me sick mit my stomach all over!"

But the major glared back at the others in bold defiance.

"I tell you what it is," he cried, thrusting his hand behind him, as if he meditated drawing a weapon, "men have been killed for a durned sight less than this. If I thought for a single instant that you two galoots meant for to run ag'in' and upset me like as if I was a cussed bar'l of swill, durn me if thar wouldn't be bloody massacre 'round hyer afore you could say beans!"

"Oh, it's all right; it was an accident, and thar ain't any of you damaged; so pick yourselves up," Goldlace remarked.

The three obeyed the injunction, though still glaring with angry faces at each other.

"But, I say, how air you going to settle who will be the first man?" the Californian asked, as the girl set the chair on its legs again. "I don't s'pose any one on you is willing to let the other cuss sail in ahead?"

"No, sir-ee!" cried the major. "Do you s'pose I'd be willing to play second fiddle to two beastly foreigners—me, a native born American—a child of genius and of liberty? Not much!"

"Upon me wourd! to listen to the likes of this gas-bag blowing his horn, you'd be afther thinkin' that he owned the hull town, bad 'cess to him, the fat thafe of the wourd!" the Irishman spluttered in great indignation.

"Dot mans vas a bad mans. Somepody gife me two tollars und a halof, und I kick dot balloon so many dimes as never vas!" the Dutchman declared.

"If I wasn't under bonds for killing those last two men that insulted me, I'd 'pull' on yer in a minute!" the major cried, swelling out like a turkey-cock with rage.

"Oh, come, gentlemen; you mustn't quarrel," remarked Goldlace, interfering as a peace-maker, "and as you can't all have your boots blacked at the same time, I suggest that you kinder divide the thing up. Let each man have one boot blacked, say starting with the major, then you son of the Emerald Isle kin sail in, and Sourkrout will wind up."

This novel idea took the fancy of the others, and they all agreed to it.

So the major took his seat in the chair, and Posie blacked one of his boots; then he resigned his seat to the Irishman, and one of his huge brogans was subjected to the influence of the brush in the hands of the nimble-fingered maid.

Hans was the last to be seated, and a broad grin came upon his stolid face as he watched the transformation effected by the female boot-black.

"Now stand in a row and let me look at your hoofs!" ordered the High Horse, as the Dutchman rose from the chair.

The contrast between the unblackened boots and the ones upon which Posie had operated was remarkable. By this time quite a little crowd of loungers had collected, attracted by the strangeness of the affair.

"Thar, now you're half-way, and I reckon I'll pull out," remarked Goldlace, with a comical grin. "I said I'd go half-way in the business, and I'm a man of my word, every time, and you kin bet on it; but you fellers will have to foot the rest of the bill, and, leetle gal, git your money in advance, or nary sight of it air you likely to see. Hyer's a four-bit piece for to squar' up as far as you've got."

And Goldlace gave the money to Posie, while the bystanders, who by this time had begun to understand the joke, commenced a series of sarcastic and laughable remarks at the expense of the three.

They were fairly entrapped; not one of the three had a cent, and as the girl, taking her cue from Goldlace, firmly refused to complete the job until she saw the color of their money, they were at last compelled to sneak off, followed by the shouts of the crowd, who unanimously voted the joke to be a first-class one in every respect.

But, hardly were the three out of sight when a new-comer appeared upon the scene.

A medium-sized, muscularly-built fellow, with a bulldog-like head, roughly dressed, with an oddly shaped fur cap pulled down over his ears.

He was a stranger to all present, yet from the peculiar way in which he swaggered up to the

throng one and all guessed that he had come into the camp claiming to be a "chief" and was on mischief bent.

"Hyer I am!" he roared, as he came up, halted and struck a position. "Look at me, size me up and see w'ot kind of a critter I am. I'm the Boss Thumper from Thumpertown, and I'm hungry for a go at the galoot w'ot calls himself the High Hoss of the Pacific."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BEST MAN IN TEXAS.

The citizens looked at each other in amazement, for they were taken completely by surprise by the announcement.

The moment the man appeared they guessed that he was a stranger who had come into the camp for the express purpose of astonishing the natives, but they had not imagined that he was in search of any one particular man.

Fame travels on the wings of the lightning, and although Goldlace had not been many hours in Cibola City, yet it was apparent that his reputation had already begun to spread through the surrounding country.

"I'm the boss, you kin bet high on that!" the new-comer continued. "You kin bet all your wealth that I'm the best man in Texas, and you'd win the trick every time. When you hear me talk you hear the eagle scream! As I said afore, I'm the Boss Thumper from Thumpertown, the toughest bit of meat that any man kin git to chew on from hyer to nowhars."

Then the man clapped his hands against his sides in imitation of a rooster flapping his wings and crowed at the top of his lungs.

"Cock-a-doodle-do! That's my horn w'ot you hear a-blowing," he continued. "And I'm sure death to the man w'ot looks crooked at me."

"Go 'long! you're only joking," Goldlace exclaimed, not in the least discommoded by the boastings of the stranger. "You wouldn't hurt anybody. You're only trying to play it on us."

"Oh, am I? Mebbe you think that I ain't a bad man?—mebbe you don't believe that I have a galoot for breakfast every day of my life?" the other retorted.

"Is that so?" asked the High Horse, incredulously.

"Stranger, it's the dead open and shut thing that I'm giving you, and no mistake. I'm a tougher of the toughest—hard as nails, solid as rocks, and warranted to bite iron every time!" and then the man threw himself into a fighting position, and struck out vigorously at an imaginary foe.

The citizens were getting interested. They perceived that the new-comer was in earnest, and as they felt sure that Goldlace would not allow himself to be backed down, the prospect for a first-class fight was extremely good.

"I've come twenty miles this hyer morning for to climb this hyer cuss w'ot calls himself the High Hoss of the Pacific," the stranger exclaimed, vociferously. "I'm from up the river, I am, and I'm a tough cuss on wheels. I've cleaned out all the fighters in my region, and when the boys put it to me that thar was a man of war arrived in this hyer camp, a feller able to git away with ary slogger in the town, I sed to myself, says I, he's my mutton; so hyer I am, anxious for to git a look at the critter, and I don't give a durn if he's as big as the side of a house. What is he? Trot him out so that I kin git a look at him."

"Wa-al, stranger, I reckon I'll have to fill the bill," Goldlace remarked.

"Oho! you're the critter, then?" and the Boss Thumper measured the other in the most careful manner from head to heel.

"Yes, sir, hyer I am, all of me!"

"You are some size, but not half so big as the boys told on," the challenger observed. "I reckoned that you were 'bout twice as big as a common man—a kind of a sort of a giant like w'ot travels along with the shows."

"Oh, that's all a matter of opinion; some men are a heap sight bigger when they are in a fight than when they are out of one."

"That's me, every time," the other declared, earnestly. "You kin jest bet a heap of rocks on that. When I get into a fight, and go for my man, he ginerally reckons by the time I have fotched him a couple of licks, and gi'n him my b'ar-squeeze, that I weigh 'bout ten tons."

"If you can fight as well as you talk you must be a tearer!" Goldlace retorted, sarcastically, at which the bystanders snickered.

"Oh, I reckon I kin blow my bazoon as well as the next man, but inside of 'bout five minutes, mebbe, you'll discover that the way I kin talk ain't a circumstance to the way I kin fight; so peel and git ready to wade in if you've got any duds to shuck afore I take and mop the surface of the airth with you."

"Why, stranger, 'pears to me you want to quarrel," and Goldlace affected astonishment.

"Have you jest found that out, and I've been blowing my bugle round hyer for an hour?" the other cried. "Didn't I tell you that I've come twenty miles just for to skin you for all that you're worth? W'ot do you take me for, anyhow?"

"A bigger fool than you look to be."

"Wa-al, now, that does settle it, and one on us has got to die right hyer, and no mistake!" and the stranger pulled off his weather-beaten fur cap and threw it upon the ground. "Thar you are—thar's my castor shied into the ring, and hyer I am, ready to climb you for all you are worth? How will you have it—with fists or we'pons?"

"It don't matter two wags of a mule's tail to me—fists, hoofs, knives or popguns."

"That's the kind of a man I am, too," the stranger declared. "I'm good anyhow and anyway you take me. I'm the best rifle-shot that ever pulled a trigger, and when it comes down to pistols, I'm the cuss that kin make them all sick; and, as for knives, old Jim Bowie w'ot got up the we'pon wouldn't be a marker to me; fists, too, is one of my best holts, and when it comes to wrestling, I kin down a b'ar every time, and not half try, either; so I'm your man, anyway you choose to take me."

"We'll have a go with nature's we'pons first, and then if you ain't satisfied, I'll be willing to accommodate you from ten-pound cannons down to popguns," Goldlace replied, casting aside his hat and advancing.

"Oho! Now you take me whar I live!" cried the other, capering nimbly about and sparring away with his brawny arm. "You must forgive me if I knock you out on the first round, but that's a playful way I have sometimes. Once on a time the boys used to call me Billy, the Smasher, 'cause when I got into a leetle difficulty I ginerally used for to knock my man out at the first lick—jest smash all the fight right out of 'em, you know, and if you find yourself on the flat of your back with your head a-ploving a hole in the ground a foot deep you'll know that this hyer right duke of mine has been taking a few playful liberties with you; and when in years to come inquirin' friends axes you w'ot spoiled the looks of your mug, you kin tell them that once on a time you run afoul of Billy Scuppleton's fist; that's me, you know. Scuppleton is my handle, but most people call me the Boss Thumper, 'cos I'm a holy terror, and don't you forget it!"

"You better save your breath for you may need it all before you get through with this bout," the High Horse cautioned.

"Oh, go 'long! You're trying a bluff game, now, but that little dodge won't work, 'cos I hold a full hand, and I'm going to rake the pot every time!" replied Scuppleton, contemptuously.

Despite his boastful ways the man was made of good stuff and really understood something of the boxer's art, being nearly as expert in this line as his opponent, but he lacked the wonderful strength of the High Horse.

So when they came together in a "counter," the blow of the Boss Thumper, alighting on the shoulder, did no damage, but the fist of Goldlace taking the other squarely in the chest, floored him instanter.

The bystanders could not refrain from expressing their delight. The High Horse they looked upon as one of themselves, while the stranger they regarded as an interloper, and therefore rejoiced when they saw him getting the worst of the encounter.

The fallen man rose slowly to his feet, and from the look upon his face it was plainly apparent that he had come to the conclusion he had caught a Tartar.

"Darn sich slippery ground!" he cried, looking down upon the earth at his feet as though he expected to see a sheet of ice there to account for his downfall. "That warn't no fair, squar' knock-down, you know!" he continued. "That were a slip, and slips don't count, no-how!"

"Jest as you say, stranger; I ain't a-going to quarrel with you on a little p'int like that," Goldlace replied, throwing himself in position again to receive an attack. "It don't matter to me what you call it, a slip or a knock-down; it's all the same, so long as I'm able to lay you on your back, but I reckon that a half-dozen more of sich slips will be pretty apt to knock all the fight out of you."

"It's a lie! I'm good for an hour yet!" howled the Thumper, and then, changing his tactics, he made a desperate rush at his antagonist, as if expecting to bear him down by the sudden attack.

Never was there a more utter failure.

The High Horse stopped him right at the beginning with a flush hit at the throat, and followed that up with a tremendous left-hander which, catching the other upon the chin, caused him to measure his length upon the ground, his head striking the earth with a force which made him see more stars than he ever beheld in the sky.

"Another slip," suggested one of the bystanders, maliciously.

"Oh, no; he's jest sot down to cool himself off, that's all," suggested another.

CHAPTER XV.

AN ASTOUNDING FEAT.

THAT the Boss Thumper from Thumpertown had got decidedly more than he had bargained for was apparent by the expression upon his face

as he rose to his feet after this second downfall, yet by no means was he disposed to back out. He had not yet received sufficient punishment to induce him to adopt that course, but he had become decidedly more cautious and wary of his antagonist.

He had tried two ways of attack and found to his disgust that his opponent was more than his match at both; so, one thing only was left for him to do, and that was to close in with the High Horse and see if he was as good at wrestling as he was at boxing.

The jeering remarks of the bystanders, too, urged him on to do the best he knew how. It was an awful joke on a tough who came into a strange camp, assuming to be a first-class thumper, to be skinned by the first man he tackled.

And then it was quite true, too, his assertion that he had come twenty miles for the express purpose of "knocking out" the stranger who claimed to be the High Horse of the Pacific, and what was worse, he had told all his associates in the little mining-camp up on the Rio Cibolo, where he resided, that he would not return until he had "mopped the airth" with the carcass of the "ridiculous galoot" who dared to come and flaunt the Golden State in the faces of the dwellers in the Texas land.

Some of the men of Boss Thumper's camp had chanced to be in Cibolo City, on the night Gold-lace had made his appearance there, and their stories of the prowess of the unknown man had fired the soul of Scuppleton.

"That's the very identical kind of a cuss I am jest a-dying to get hold on!" he had declared, and wound up by saying that he would start the first thing in the morning and before he had been an hour in Cibolo City he would make the new-comer own right up that he wasn't no "great shakes of a man nohow."

But, now that he had felt the weight of the High Horse's fist, it had occurred to him, to use the good old Western phrase—that "he had bitten off more than he could chew."

He was famous as a wrestler, though; never had he met his match since he had been a dweller on the border.

It was do or die now. He was a disgraced man, if he didn't succeed in conquering his opponent. As he muttered between his clinched teeth, advancing cautiously upon his antagonist:

"I must git some show for my money, or else I'm a gone sucker in this hyer region. If he bests me I'll never dar' to show my head in this hyer camp ag'in."

"Time!" howled one of the bystanders, anxious for the fun to begin.

"You had better keep yer mouth shet, you maverick-stealing son of a prairie-dog!" cried the Boss Thumper, indignantly. "I reckon that if you were standing up hyer you wouldn't be so anxious to howl time!"

"Oh, I don't know 'bout that!" retorted the other, insolently, thinking that he had a safe thing of it in chaffing Scuppleton now that he had his hands full.

"Step up to the captain's office and take a hack at it then," the champion remarked. "I'll retire in your favor, and you can face the music, or if that don't suit you, this gent mebbe will give 'way," and he nodded to the High Horse, "and give me a show to pound some sense into yer!"

"Wa-al, I—oh, I don't want to quarrel," replied the miner, getting red in the face, and resenting indignantly the nudges of those in his neighborhood, who pretended to be anxious for him to go forward.

"If talking was biz, though, you'd be at the top of the heap," Scuppleton observed, with biting sarcasm.

There was a general laugh at this, and the imprudent miner concluded that he had a little business to which he must attend just then, and edged his way through the crowd.

This little episode helped Scuppleton considerably, for it afforded him time to recover his wind, for the severe exertion had made him puff and pant like a porpoise.

"Now, stranger, look out for me, for I'm coming!" he called out.

He was one of the odd kind of men who must do just so much talking.

"I'm all ready for you, Thumper," Goldlace replied. "Let 'er thump!"

There was considerable maneuvering on the part of Scuppleton, for he wanted to close in with his antagonist without giving the latter a chance to "send him to grass" with another knock-down blow.

He had been well-shaken up by the two strokes which he had already received, together with the solid manner in which he had struck the ground, and felt satisfied that he couldn't stand much more in that line.

He was now sparring "for all he was worth," and being more cautious than at first, was doing decidedly better.

A dozen or so of light taps were exchanged, none of them doing any particular damage, and neither of the contestants being able to boast of any advantage over his opponent; then there came the chance for which the up-countryman was on the lookout.

It was almost impossible to tell how it came about, but the first thing the bystanders knew the two men were in close contact hammering away at each other with wonderful energy.

And now a really wonderful thing took place, and it was done so quickly that not a soul of the lookers on could explain how it was performed.

Scuppleton went flying through the air like a bird. His antagonist had grabbed him by the throat, and by the waistband lifted him bodily from the earth and swung him up into the air.

There was a low one-storied shanty close at hand with a peaked roof, and the High Horse had calculated so closely that the Boss Thumper alighted exactly astride of this roof, and from that position looked down upon the gaping crowd below, the most astonished man who ever drew breath.

It was a minute before he could speak, all the spare breath having been knocked out of him by the concussion.

"Say, how on airth did I come hyer?" he cried, as soon as he recovered the use of his voice. "Did the ground rise and h'ist me like a bucking mule, or did this ere shanty grow up like a mushroom under me without my knowing it?"

The High Horse stood with folded arms and looked up at his antagonist in a quizzical sort of way.

"Come, old man, you'll have to come down out of that," he said. "You mustn't expect that I am going up thar on the roof to fight you, for I'm no chimney-sweep."

"Neither am I, though I reckon I'd answer mighty well for a sign jest as I am now; sich a thing would make the fortune of any shebang in the camp. But say, did I understand you for to invite me for to come down and fite you some more?"

"That's my platform!"

"Waal, it ain't mine, not by a durned sight!" returned Scuppleton, doggedly. "I want you and the rest of the gang to distinctly understand that thar ain't anything of the hog 'bout me. No man ever accused me of not knowing when I got enuff, and I reckon that I am filled up chock-full as I kin stick now."

"No man from hyer to nowhars kin say with truth that I ever was afeard of anything that walks on two legs, but when it comes to tackling a cyclone powerful enuff to lift a feller right off the solid airth and squat him astride of a shanty, jest as if it war a blamed mule, then I reckon it's 'bout time for me to pull out."

"Then you are satisfied?"

"Satisfied! Why, stranger, w'ot on airth do you take me to be?" the conquered man cried, wonderingly. "I'm a reasonable man, I am—reasonable as you kin scare up in the hull State of Texas. I might be able to git along with a man flopping me over on my back and a-playing football with me, but when it comes to turning me into a durned balloon, I tell you that is a leetle too much of a good thing."

"I pass, I do, stranger, and you kin jest count me out of the game for good and all, and if you'll let me go home to my own corral, I'll be mighty much obligated to you. You have rounded me up, stranger, and I'm ready to give in that you're the biggest high horse I ever run across since I war hatched."

Then Scuppleton slid down from the roof, and with a crestfallen air picked up his cap, pulled it down over his ears and bestowed a parting nod upon Goldlace.

"I'm a whipped man, and I don't keer who knows it," he remarked, with a defiant glance at the jeering bystanders. "And I'm ready to own up to it, too, like a man, but, as I howled a minute ago, I never tacked a cyclone afore, and I never will ag'in, if I know it—so long!" and then he departed.

Again the High Horse was the hero of the hour.

CHAPTER XVI.

PRINCE CONGO.

By the time that the struggle came to an end quite a crowd had gathered, and when the up-country champion departed, a far wiser man than when he had so boastfully entered the camp, the exultation of the citizens was unbounded, and Goldlace had hard work to get away from his admirers, all eager to congratulate him upon the triumph which he had so easily achieved.

By this time the three bummers had again made their appearance. The major had managed to borrow a brush and some blacking, and so he and his companions made a presentable show.

"Biggest thing, sir, that ever this hyer town has seen since she had a local habitation and a name, and that 'ere dates back two thousand years or more. I move, feller-citizens, that we raise a subscription to set up a basket of wine in honor of the victory which our noble townsman has achieved over this skunk from some miserable little camp up in the mountains, next door to Sundown!" cried the major, ever on the alert to secure a drink without being obliged to pay for it.

The idea at once took the popular fancy, al-

though the High Horse protested against it, but the major passed around the hat and collected thirty odd dollars in no time.

Then the crowd adjourned to the Great American Eagle Saloon, where, under the major's direction, a basket of wine was served to the thirsty miners, who had "chipped in" for the treat, with the idea that they would get their money's worth out of it, anyway.

But they had counted without their host—for the major, with his capacious swallow, managed to "get away" with two glasses, while every one else was drinking one, which gave rise to considerable dissatisfaction.

"You durned thirsty cuss of a swill tub!" cried one of the miners, enraged at getting "left," "you've got a gullet bigger'n a mule, anyhow. You kin drink more than any four men in the crowd, and w'ot in thunder did you chip in to this hyer pool, anyway?"

"Nary cent! you kin bet all your ducats on that, every time!" another one of the crowd responded.

"What did I give, gentlemen—is that the question?" cried the major, pompously, drawing himself up and assuming an indignant air.

"Yes, sir, you bet, hoss-fly, it air!" retorted the first miner.

"You know you didn't chip nary cent into the pot!" cried the other.

"He never was known to be guilty of putting up a cent for anything in his life," a third added.

"What did I give, gentlemen, eh? what did I give? You're all anxious to know?" shouted the veteran at the top of his lungs, and in his extravagant, theatrical way.

"You bet!" in a sort of chorus from the crowd.

"I gave the most valuable contribution in the hull business!" the major declared—an assertion immediately greeted with ironical groans.

"Yes, gentlemen, I gave—the *idea*! Whar would you have been if I hadn't thought of it? Answer me that now!"

This turned the laugh upon the veteran's persecutors, and under cover of it he managed to make his escape.

"Mighty narrow squeeze that," he muttered, after he had got in the street. "Don't hardly pay a man of genius like myself, for they kept such a close watch upon me that all I could corral out of the hat was a paltry two dollars," and the old rascal slipped the two silver dollars from his left hand, where he had held them concealed all the while, into his pocket.

"I was in hopes that somebody would have slung in a five-dollar shinplaster, and the way I would have gobbled it would have been a caution, but things are coming to an awful state; there's no encouragement for honest industry now," and the major sauntered up the street, sighing deeply as he reflected how sadly times had degenerated since the golden days of '49.

Goldlace, who hated above all things to be mixed up in one of these carousing crowds, did his best to get away, but the miners were so determined upon making a hero of him that he would have had hard work to get out of the saloon had not a diversion occurred in his favor.

Into the place rushed one of the wags of the town, a fast young man known as Jakey Soaper.

"Oh, come outside, boys! Pile out as fast as ever you can; thar's a bushful of fun out thar. Prince Congo has come into the camp with the worst-looking mule you ever saw and he wants to sell him. Come out if you want to see fun!"

No second invitation was needed, for Prince Congo was a well known character and the miners hastened to see the sport.

Goldlace followed, thankful for the relief.

The individual, who bore so strange a name, was a middle-aged negro, as black as the ace of spades, and as fat as a prize-hog.

He was a born trader if ever there was one; as shrewd as a fox and with as little conscience as a wolf.

He picked up a good living entirely by trading in all sorts of things. He was always ready to give something for almost anything, and yet he seldom bought an article that he did not contrive in some way to make an "honest penny" by.

He had come into the town, leading by a rope-halter, a large, brown mule, a sleepy-looking animal, yet one that looked as though it was capable of doing good work.

"Now's yer time, gemmen," he said, with a grin which seemed to extend his huge mouth from ear to ear as the laughing crowd surrounded him; "yere's de most splendiferous animal dat war eber raised outside ob ole Kentucky. Now's yer time, gemmens, if you is arter de biggest bargain of de season. Whoa, Napoleon!"

"Vat is dat?" cried a miner, in an excited tone—a withered-looking little fellow, known as French Joe, from the fact that he claimed La Belle France as a birthplace.

"Napoleon; dat's w'ot I sed; w'ot's de matter wid you, anyhow?" demanded the negro, in supreme disdain.

"You call dat skinny old muel Napoleon! Oh, *morbleu!*" and the Frenchman capered up and down like a dancing Jack in his rage.

"No, he ain't blue nor more blue, either!" cried the negro. "Wot's de matter? Ain't you got a pair ob eyes in yer head? Dat animile is brown—de finest color in de world for a mule. Whoa, Napoleon!" and he gave the halter a vigorous jerk, as if the mule was frisking about as lively as a flea, when in truth the beast seemed going to sleep.

"Oh, *mon Dieu, Napoleon!*" and the angry son of Gaul ground his teeth in a transport of rage. "Oh, miserable, to call zat nasty beast by ze name of ze greatest man zat ze world ever saw. Aha! I will even with you be. I have in my cabin a young coyote, a miserable leetle wretch so full of ze fleas zat ven zey all hop he from ze ground jumps up. Ven I go home I call zat rascal wolf Blackman Yankee Doodle, aha!" And a sardonic grin appeared on the face of the speaker as he folded his arms majestically across his diminutive breast and looked around him with the air of a conqueror.

"By golly! you kin call de coyote wot you like for all I keer," the negro replied, as soon as the laughter of the crowd, caused by the announcement of the Frenchman's vengeance, had ceased, so that he could speak. "I didn't name dis yere mule anyway. Dat is wot de man called him dat I bought de animile from, and if you don't like hit, you had better hunt him up an' settle de question wid him. As far as dis yere chile is concerned I don't keer two skips of a flea 'bout it. Or if you feel so mighty sorry 'bout it, why don't you buy dis splendid ferocious animile? Den you kin call him wot you like."

"Yes, yes," chimed in half a dozen of the crowd, anxious for fun; "buy it, buy it, Frenchy!"

Joe elevated his shoulders after the fashion so common to the sons of sunny France.

"I would ze animal buy queequer zan you could say Robingson Jack, but le argent—ze du-cats—ze spot cash, I hafe not so mooch monish as once upon ze time when in my own carriage I rode in de queen citee of ze world, dear Paree."

"Oh, go ahead; I'll lend you what you want!" Jacky Soaper exclaimed, eager to help the joke along.

"Of course, we'll all chip in," cried another joker.

And half a dozen more thrust their hands into their pockets, loudly exclaiming that they would be glad to contribute toward making up a purse.

The negro grinned with delight, although he was too shrewd not to have a slight suspicion that there might be some fooling in the matter.

"How mooch you ask, eh?" queried Joe. "Seeing as it's you, I'll take a hundred dollars, but I ought to hab a hundred an' a quarter."

The crowd groaned in chorus, and the promptitude with which they all took their hands out of their pockets was wonderful.

"A hundred dollars!" cried Jacky Soaper. "Go 'way, man! You're clean off your base! A hundred dollars! Say! what kind of a camp do you take this to be, anyway? Do you think we're all bonanza kings hyer? I reckoned you would say about five, and considering how old the mule is and how utterly worthless, it would be a good price."

"Go 'long, white man, you're talkin' foolishness now!" Congo protested, indignantly. "Dis yer mule is dirt cheap at a hundred dollars, sure as ye'r born."

"Nig, you've come to the wrong place to sell that mule!" cried Jacky, abruptly. He had walked up to the animal and examined it closely while the darky was speaking. "I thought the beast looked familiar to me. Boys, it's Pete Jenkins's old mule. You remember Pete, who works the Red Horse claim two miles up the crick! The beast is as balky as the deuce, and worse than a broncho for bucking. When Pete owned him the only good he could get out of the beast was to win money by betting that no man could stick on his back over five minutes, and no man ever did, that I heered tell on."

A roar of recognition at once went up from the bystanders, for it was Pete Jenkins's old mule, sure enough.

Prince Congo's underjaw dropped, for he saw that he could not fool any one in that camp with the worthless, vicious beast, which he had purchased that morning on the trail from a disgusted mule-skinner who had been stuck with the beast and had just got out his revolver to transform the live mule into dead carrion.

The negro had offered two dollars, thinking that he saw a chance for a speculation, and the owner of the beast promptly accepted, remarking that the "durned cuss isn't worth wasting powder and ball on, anyway."

"Fore de Lawd! gemmens, I'spec' dat I'm stuck on dis yere beast den," Congo observed, disconsolately.

"That's a sure enough fact!" Jacky exclaimed. "I'm open to bet five dollars that thar ain't a man in the town kin stick on his back for five minutes!"

"I kin ride that mule!" cried Major Bum, proudly.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE MAJOR'S ATTEMPT.

A SHOUT of derision arose at this announcement, for no one in the crowd had ever seen the veteran on the back of any animal, and consequently no one of them believed he could do anything in the riding line.

"Oh, you kin crack your sides with your howling!" the major exclaimed. "But, I tell you, I know exactly what I'm talking about. I'm an old horseman, I am! I was raised in Kentucky, in the blue grass region, and I learned to ride before I was knee-high to a grasshopper."

"And you think you kin ride that mule?" asked Jacky, incredulously.

"I reckon I can hold on, mighty satrap!"

"I'll go you five dollars you can't for five minutes, nohow you kin fix it. That is, if the dark is willing to allow the trial, and, Congo, I'll give you half the winnings."

"All right, sah, I'se agreeable. If I can't sell de beast to any one ob yous gemmen I must make money out ob him in some way."

"Put up your five dollars!" cried Jacky, producing a handful of silver.

"Ha, hum. I'm a leetle short this morning; est paid off some leetle bills," said the major.

"I'll put up my note—"

At this point he was interrupted by a general laugh of derision.

"Your note!" cried Jacky, in disgust. "What in thunder is the good of that? Who'll take it?"

"I am proud to say that a great many people have taken it!" the major replied, loftily.

"Yes, and I've no doubt they are holding right on it and will for some time to come," retorted Soaper.

"I shouldn't be at all surprised," observed the veteran, with a grin, "and if they find at any time that their grip is slipping, my advice to them would be to spit on their hands and take a fresh hold."

"Well, as far as I am concerned, I ain't a-doing that kind of business now. It's cash with me in sporting matters," Jacky retorted.

"I'll put up for the major," said the High Horse, at this point. "I'll go five dollars rather than have the sport spoiled, although I'm afeard that he can't keep on the beast, for I know the animal. I saw the trick tried about a month ago at Fort Davis, and the beast was too much for every man that tried the rifle."

The major looked rather sober at this information, and he walked around the sleepy-looking beast and surveyed him critical eyes.

To all appearances there was very little spunk or fire in the brute, but, as the veteran observed:

"A mule, gentlemen, is the most deceptive reptile that walks the earth. In my time I have known one that had a grudge ag'in' a man to refrain from betraying it for six months, waiting to get a good chance at his enemy, and then, when the opportunity occurred, the celerity with which that mule put its heels where they would do the most good was truly wonderful."

"Kinder afeard to tackle him, ain't yer?" "Thinking about backing out, I reckon," observed Soaper, with a wink at the bystanders.

"Nary time!" responded the veteran, drawing himself up with great dignity. "The cussed beast may succeed in h'isting me over his head and so materially damage the arrangements of my internal economy, but I said that I would make the trial, and Major Bumgartner is a man of his word, every time! I'm the clean, white article, and safe to tie to, you bet! All I ask is, if the long-eared son of Satan succeeds in breaking my neck, that the boys will see I am decently planted in first-class Eastern style. Don't disgrace the town with any slouch of a funeral."

"You jest wade in, major. If the critter does 'douse your glim,' I'll engage you shall have as nice a funeral as ever was seen in the State of Texas, bar none!" cried Goldlace encouragingly.

"You do me proud!" and the veteran favored his backer with a dignified bow. "I'm a warrior, although I am a leetle rusty just now, and not the man I used to be."

"Now then, all ready, go it, major!" Jacky exclaimed.

Pulling his hat firmly down upon his ears, with an agility that astonished the bystanders, for no one believed that the old man could be so spry, the veteran vaulted upon the back of the mule, and at the same moment the negro released his grasp on the halter.

Then there came a wonderful transformation. The patient, sleepy-looking animal suddenly became endowed with motion.

With a demoniac-like squeal he lowered his head and sent his hind-legs flying into the air with a most terrific kick.

It was as if the weight of the human upon his back had transformed him into a fiend.

The major had not boasted recklessly though of his abilities in the riding line.

He was prepared for the demonstration and sat the beast like a centaur.

Then, just as if the mule had discovered that he had a practiced rider on his back instead of

some raw recruit, he indulged in a series of violent kicks, in each one of which he elevated his heels far higher than his head, then reared upward, standing on his hind-legs with such persistent determination, that it seemed almost miraculous that he did not fall over backward.

But all through these maneuvers, the major stuck to him like a leech, the perspiration however, streaming from every pore, for it required all his strength and skill to keep his seat.

Then the mule commenced a series of short jumps, interspersed by violent kicks and plunges.

The bystanders looked on, roaring with laughter, but when the animal in his rage took into his head to charge right through the crowd, it was as much as they could do to get out of his way and avoid the lightning-like heels.

Soaper came within an ace of being kicked and only escaped by making a most prodigious leap.

"Cuss the beast!" he yelled, "'twa'n't in the programme for him to cave in my head or put his durned heels into my stomach!"

Then, as if exhausted by his violent exertions, the brute ceased his plunges and began to paw the ground, just as if he was sick of his bargain, but knew not how to get rid of the human burden clinging so closely to his back.

"The major is going to win as sure as shooting!" the High Horse exclaimed, "Stick to him, old top! He ain't bucked with you yet, and I'm afraid that is his best holt. If you kin stand that you're all right."

"Whoa, you beast! Don't you dare to buck a gentleman and a scholar! For heaven's sake, boys, how much more is there left of the five minutes!" cried the major, evidently nearly exhausted. "Durned if it don't seem to me as if I had been on his cussed back for about an hour. I feel as if every bone in my body was broken. I never worked so hard for five dollars afore in my life. The next time any of you chaps want me to ride a mule it will cost you a clean hundred chucks, and no mistake."

"Two minutes more! stick to him, major, and the money's yours!" cried the miner with the watch who was acting as timekeeper.

"Stick to him! Well, you kin jest bet all your wealth I will!" exclaimed the veteran.

The vaunt was hardly uttered, however, when the mule, as if he resented the boast, suddenly gave some queer little short jumps, humping his back in a peculiar manner at the same time.

Napoleon was bucking!

And the major exhausted by his efforts, was pitched violently from the beast's back.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A REMARKABLE BET.

AND then, after he had dislodged his rider, the beast turned around as if to see where he was, and, having ascertained his position, commenced to kick at the fallen form of the major, who had gone down all in a heap.

One of the bystanders happened to have a stout stick in his hand, though, and he soon put a stop to this fun and thereby saved the veteran, who most certainly would have been seriously damaged by the heels of the vicious brute, if he had not been driven off.

"Look at dat 'ere!" cried Prince Congo, in huge glee; "hain't dat 'ere animile worthy of being called Napoleon? Ain't he de tuffest mule dat eber was see'd?"

"Are you dead, major?" asked Soaper. "If you air, sit up and say so!"

With a groan the veteran rose to a sitting posture.

"Hyers my shoulders, but whar's my head?" he exclaimed, dismally.

"Oh, you're all right; you're worth a dozen dead men yet!" remarked Goldlace, cheerfully. "I'spose it felt as if the ground had kinder h'isted and throwed you, but it wasn't anything but that or'nary beast of a mule trying a buck on you. I mistrust that air leetle trick was his best holt."

"And I used to be counted about as good a rider as could be scared up in the parts where I came from, too, and if you don't find good jockeys in Kentucky, whar on earth are you going to scare them up?" the major remarked.

"That's so, old man; it's no disgrace to you to be thrown by that brute," the High Horse observed. "I'm something of a rider myself, and I reckon I know what I'm talking about; but I say, are you all right—no bones broken?"

"All right, I reckon, though mighty well shaken up; but like the feller in the play, I'm badly wounded in my reputation. I won't be able to crow about my riding in this hyer camp again, for the moment I begin to toot my horn some cuss will be sure to yell out, 'How 'bout the big mule, major?'" replied the veteran, ruefully.

"Ask the man if he could have stuck on," replied Goldlace. "Hyers yer five dollars," he said to Soaper, giving him the money. "And hyers a five for you, major; 'tain't your fault that you didn't succeed in the attempt. You did the best you knew how."

"Ah, yes, as the poet says, 'It's not in mor-

tals to command success, but we'll do more, deserve it."

"The five will be salve to your bruises," the High Horse observed.

"And as it's a dead snre thing that he will spend it all for whisky, it's plain he's more hurt inside than out," Jacky remarked.

"He jests at scars that never felt a wound," quoted the major; "but, Soaper, I disremember ever taking a drink at your expense, so I do not see how you can know anything about it, except by hearsay."

This rather turned the laugh on Jacky, and in order to get out of it he observed to Goldlace:

"That was a bad investment of yours; it was really a dead open and shut swindle on you, for I don't believe thar's a man living who can stick on the back of that beast for five minutes. I was really betting on a sure thing, for when the brute belonged to Pete Jenkins I've known dozens of the best riders in the country to try it on and nary one of them could ever make the raffle."

"Oh, I reckon it can be done," Goldlace observed, carelessly.

"Are you talking now for fun or money?" Jacky exclaimed, eagerly.

"For money, sir; I'm one of that kind of men who never trouble themselves to shoot off their mouths without having something to say."

"Are you willing to back up that opinion with solid stuff?"

"Right you are, sir, every time," the High Horse responded.

"For how much?" Soaper was eager on the scent, for he saw money in the game.

"As much as you like."

"Do you mean it?"

"You can bet all you're worth on it!"

"How does a hundred strike you?" Jacky asked, assuming a carelessness which he was far from feeling, for he thought he had so sure a thing that whatever sum the High Horse could be induced to bet was as good as his the moment it was staked.

"A hundred, sir, will suit me as well as any other sum, except two hundred; two hundred would agree with my pocket-book better, five hundred better than two, and a thousand or so would just fill the bill," Goldlace responded, fully as carelessly as the other.

The crowd stared; they were not used to the magnificent ideas of the Californian sharps, and this talk of thousands amazed them.

Despite his long experience as a sport this "loose and keerness" talk made Jacky Soaper open his eyes.

"Oh, come now! you are jest trying to bluff me!" he exclaimed. "You don't honestly mean to say that you would be willing to go a thousand dollars in this game?"

"That is the lead I propose to follow if you care to chip in to the tune of a thousand," the High Horse replied, quietly, and yet with an air that fully convinced the majority of the listeners that if the opportunity offered he would be as good as his word.

"I reckon that if I planked down a thousand you wouldn't be in any hurry to cover it," Jacky observed, reluctant to be bluffed by the stranger and yet without the slightest idea of risking such a sum.

"The best way to prove whether that is true or not is to try it on," Goldlace rejoined. "Put up your money, and then we will see what we shall see."

"I've a durned good mind to do it, jest to see you back out!" Soaper exclaimed, in a sort of a desperate way.

"Oh, what do you want to say that for?" the High Horse asked. "You know deuced well you ain't got any sich idea in your noddle at all. You know you wouldn't dare to put up a thousand on any kind of a game, and that's the sort of man you air. You're jest talking for the sake of hearing yourself talk, and you don't mean business, nary time!"

"I'll bet you a hundred dollars I do!" cried Soaper, beginning to lose his temper, for he saw sarcastic smiles on the faces of nearly all the bystanders, and he pulled out a huge roll of bills which he flourished in the air. "Mebbe you think I am broke, but I ain't," he continued. "I've won the first trick on this muel, and I reckon I kin take every one that's in the game. I don't believe thar's a man, woman, or child on the top of this hyer earth who kin stick on the back of that critter, and hyer's the good, solid stuff to back up my opinion. Money talks, pardner, put up or take a back seat!"

"Nary back seat for me; I allers take a reserved one, right down in front, so that I kin see all that thar is to be seen of the elephant," the High Horse replied. "But now that you have produced your wealth I reckon I'm jest about the sized chap that kin accommodate you. I think I kin produce a party that kin stick on the back of that mule for five minutes providing that I am allowed to hold the critter's hind legs."

These words, spoken with the utmost seriousness, astonished all who listened.

As for Soaper he was so completely astounded by the novel proposal that he could hardly believe that he had heard correctly.

"Wot's that! hold the hind legs of the mule? Why, you're joking!"

"Nary time! I never was more serious in my life; 'sides, I ain't the kind of man that believes in joking 'bout these leetle business matters," Goldlace replied, at the same time producing his money. "Hyers the stuff that talks; folks may chatter as much as they please, but when a man puts up his money, that means business, every time."

"I'll go you anywhere from a hundred to a thousand dollars that I can produce a party who can stick on the back of that mule for five minutes, provided I am allowed to hold his hind legs."

"Why, man, the beast will kick your brains out," Soaper exclaimed, not knowing what to make of this, to him, utterly ridiculous proposal.

"Dat's so, boss, sure as ye'r' born!" the negro added. "Fore de Lawd, I wouldn't risk dat air 'ting for all de gold dat ebber was digged in Californy."

"Clear suicide!" remarked the major, with a wise shake of the head.

"So much the better for the man that backs the animal," the High Horse retorted. "Come, put up your money; I'm not joking a bit, but mean business from the word go. I reckon I'm a pretty strong man when I'm put to it, and if I ain't able to hold the hind legs of a miserable old mule, a-standing right at death's door, then I hain't got any call to set myself up for a modern Samson. Hyer's the hundred dollars, stranger," and the High Horse waved two fifty-dollar bills at Soaper. "Come down with your dust now if you mean fun!"

"Oh, I'm your man, but it will be sheer robbery to take your wealth, for the mule will kick you into splinters inside of two minutes," Soaper rejoined, counting out his money.

"Shall I hold the stakes, gentlemen?" asked the major, bustling forward.

"Not by a durned sight!" cried Goldlace. "It would take too many to hold you; Dutchy hyer will do." And so the money was placed in the saloon-keeper's hands.

CHAPTER XIX.

GOLDLACE'S PARD.

THE DUTCHMAN had been attracted from his retreat by the intelligence that Major Bum had backed himself to ride a vicious mule and he had come upon the ground with the pleasing expectation of seeing the veteran beat killed by the animal, and yet he hardly desired the major's death, for there was a long score run up by the bumner, and if the mule should finish him, that, of course, would wipe out the matter, although in his heart of hearts the saloon-keeper knew that there wasn't much chance of his ever collecting any of the bill whether the veteran lived or died.

Yet the Dutchman had been imposed upon so much by the major that he felt a savage joy when he witnessed his downfall, and he was really sorry that the mule did not succeed in getting at least one kick at his prostrate form.

"By chiminy Christmas! if I was a moole I would kick him mineseluf shust for to satisfaction get," he muttered under his breath, as he beheld the mule retreat, cowed by the vigorous whacks inflicted by the stout club.

"Sapperment!" he cried, astounded, as the money was placed in his hands and he reflected upon the terms of the wager, "vot for you make one fools of yourseluf? Dot moole! I know him! I was introduced to him more ash a year ago. I would not de hind legs of dot moole hold for two dollars and a halluf!"

"Dat's jest wot I say, boss!" cried the negro. "Two dollars and a half! Go 'long, Dutchman! I wouldn't try dat operation on dat mule for dis yere hull town; no, sah, nohow you kin fix it, for wot good would de camp be to me after dat beast had kicked de breff out ob me? Oh, he's bad, he is! He's de worst mule dat I ebber run across in all my born days. I know'd he was balky; I know'd dat he didn't keer to be ridden, 'cos he h'isted an' frowned me when I tried it. By golly! I nebber got off an animile so quick—over his head—afore in my life. I s'pose he would have turned 'round an' tried for to kick in de top of my head, too, if he hadn't pitched me clean into de crick whar he couldn't git at me, but he's a bad mule, sah, for shure!"

"The money's up and we'll try it on, anyway," said the High Horse. "All I want is a fair field and no favor, and if I don't corral this leetle hundred dollars, then I ain't the man I think I am."

"Go ahead as soon as you like," observed Soaper, who did not know exactly what to make of the matter. "All I've got to say is this: if you succeed in holding the hind legs of that mule, you're the best man that ever struck this town."

"You can bet all your ducats on that!" cried the major; "the best man that the world has seen since Samson pulled down the gates and slew the Philistines. Funny, too, Soaper, Samson used to use the same weapon that you sling once in a while."

"What was that?" Jacky asked, innocently,

never suspecting a trap, not being much of a Biblical student.

"The jawbone of an ass," gravely replied the veteran, and the crowd fairly howled with delight at seeing the old bumner thus neatly "get away" with the sport.

"Durn me if I don't git squar' with you for that, one of these days!" cried the sharp, in a rage.

"Will you use that weapon? Because, if you calculate to, I must decline the contest on the ground that it would be an unfair deal, as I'm no match for you in that line."

There was another snicker at this, and more than one in the crowd expressed their opinion that when it came to a question of wits there wasn't a man in the camp who could "git away" with the major.

"We'll go ahead with the funeral if you're all ready," Goldlace said. "Now, Nig, I want you to take hold of the halter and hold him still; then at a word from me my pard will leap upon his back, I'll grab the animal's legs and you let go of the rope, and then we'll see what we shall see."

"You won't see much a minute after that happens, for the mule will lay you out, as sure as shooting," Soaper observed, mystified that the High Horse was really going to undertake the remarkable task, for he had got the idea in his head, notwithstanding the money was up, that there was some trick about the matter, for he could not bring himself to believe that any man in his sober senses would undertake to perform such a desperate feat, particularly after witnessing the display of viciousness that the animal had exhibited.

"Will you go another hundred on that?" asked Goldlace, again "going down" after his money.

"No, no," cried Jacky, hastily. "I've put up all I'm going to put up."

"Wa-al, I'm sorry, for I did want to scoop you another hundred," observed Goldlace, regretfully.

"You ain't scooped that one yet."

"It's all over, stranger, but the shouting."

"I'll believe that when I see it; but who's your pard? Who's going to ride the mule?" asked Soaper, looking about him, for no one seemed to have the least idea of coming forward.

"I reckon I'll have to astonish all you galoots by asking sissy yonder to try her hand with the critter," and Goldlace nodded toward Posie McKinney, the female bootblack, who was taken utterly by surprise, for she had been eagerly watching the scene without the slightest suspicion that she was going to be called upon to take an active part in it.

The eyes of all the crowd were instantly turned upon her, and she blushed clear to the roots of her beautiful golden hair at finding herself the center of all eyes.

"But mebbe I'm a leetle hasty 'bout this hyer thing; mebbe you can't ride well enough for to risk your precious self on this blamed old mule," Goldlace continued.

"Oh, I can ride, sir," replied the girl, her natural courage coming to her aid. "I have been used to riding all sorts of horses ever since I was a little girl, and most of them, too, without either saddle or bridle, and some of them pretty wild ones."

"Wa-al, then, you're jest the gal for my money, if you are willing to risk it, and if you win, the hundred dollars is yours, just as free as air."

"Oh, but thunder! look hyer," cried Soaper, who had been making eyes at the girl ever since she had begun her career, and as he had really taken quite a fancy to the pretty maiden, who had set out to fight the world so bravely on her own hook, he did not at all relish the idea of her putting herself into a position where life and limb might be endangered.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Goldlace, turning abruptly upon him.

"I didn't calculate on this!"

"Didn't calculate on what?"

"Why, on this little gal a-risking her life. The fact is, miss," he continued, bowing gallantly to the girl, "you're durned sight too precious an article in this hyer community for us to run the risk of losing you by having you h'isted off the back of that blamed mule."

"That's so, that's so!" muttered the bystanders.

It was the truth, pretty women were few and far between in Cibola City and the region tributary to that growing metropolis.

"You've jest come into the camp, and I reckon that I speak the sentiments of all the town when I say that you're as welcome as the sun."

"Bully for you! True as gospel!" came from the bystanders at this point.

"And really, we don't feel like running the risk of losing you, or having your pretty face or figur' spilt in any sich fool way as this hyer thing. I tell you honestly, pard, if I had 'a' knowed you were going to ring this lady into the blamed thing, nary step would I have taken, and I'm willing now to draw the money and let it stop jest whar it is, although I know it would be jest the same as for me to throw away

a hundred dollars, for I'm sart'in I've got a dead sure thing on winning."

"You'll be a heap sight more sure about that when you do win than you are now," Goldlace observed, dryly. "But I don't want to appear to be forcing the lady in the matter. She kin try the rifle or not, jest as she pleases."

"Can I speak with you alone for a moment before I decide?" the girl asked.

"Sart'in! thar's no objection to that as far as I can see."

"Come this way, then, please."

And the two walked away a short distance, while the rest looked on and marveled as to what the girl had to say.

"Wasn't you a little reckless in making this wager?" she asked.

"Oh, no, not a mite."

"It is terrible dangerous for you," and a slight shudder passed over the girl's slender form.

"No, no, not half as bad as you think."

"But you are risking certain death!"

"Not by a jugful!"

"There is a chance for you now to retreat with honor; your opponent is willing to declare the bet off."

"He's kinder got his pesky eyes on you, and then I reckon he's a leetle afeard lest he may get stuck," Goldlace observed.

"And do you think you can accomplish the feat?"

"I know I kin, or else I wouldn't try it; and do you think for a minute that I would expose you to any danger?"

Again the vivid blush swept over the girl's face.

"Very well, go ahead! I'll ride the beast then!" she cried, loud enough for all to hear.

CHAPTER XX.

TAMING THE BEAST.

THE girl's announcement, which was made in a tone loud enough to be heard by all the bystanders, created a profound sensation.

It was all right, in their opinion, for the major to attempt to ride the beast, and all had roared with merriment when the fat bummer had been unceremoniously tossed over the head of the animal; but for a young and pretty girl to expose herself to such peril was quite another thing, and there were many ominous shakes of the head when the High Horse and Posie McKinney walked toward the animal.

"I sw'ar!" exclaimed Soaper, "I hate to be mixed up in this hyer thing. If you should happen to get badly injured, miss, I should never be able to forgive myself for having had anything to do with it."

"I'm not at all afraid!" she declared. "As I have said, I have been used to riding ever since I was old enough to sit on a horse, and many a tumble I've taken. Besides, I have perfect faith that this gentleman will be able to hold the mule," and she nodded to the Californian. "He says he can, and he ought to know."

"I reckon the leetle gal is 'bout right thar," the High Horse observed. "A man ought to be able to tell pretty well what he kin do, and what he can't. I say I kin hold the hind legs of two sich muels as this spavined, one-leg-in-the-grave cuss, and not try very hard, either."

The fame of the stranger had spread for miles around, and now that the bystanders began to meditate about the matter, and it came back to their memory how easily the Californian had taken the burly Mexican and the massive Indian by the throats, and lifted them from the floor as though they had been mere children, the impression began to gain ground that it was possible he might be able to perform the feat which he was about to attempt.

Soaper had imagined there might be some trick about the matter; but now he saw everything was to be on the square, and he began to tremble for his hundred dollars.

So he made a last desperate effort to stop the proceedings.

"See hyer, stranger!" he exclaimed, addressing the High Horse. "I was a-betting in the dark when I socked up the hundred chunks. If I had 'a' known that you were going to pick out Miss Posie for to ride the mule, I wouldn't have bet ten cents on it."

"Fact is, miss, I would rather give you a hundred not to do it. I don't keer for the money, but, I sw'ar, I don't want to see you hurt."

The bystanders began to snicker. Soaper's reputation in the camp was that of a man who was never known to let go of a cent he could possibly hold, and the idea that he would fling away a hundred dollars so loosely was too much for the risibles of the crowd.

The people, too, were impatient to see the feat attempted.

They did not believe the girl would be injured, and if she was willing to take the risk, they did not think that it was anybody else's business.

"Too thin—too thin—altogether too gauzy," murmured the crowd, and Soaper saw that public sentiment was decidedly against him.

"All right; go ahead if you're bound to, but I want you all to understand that you mustn't blame me if Miss Posie hyer gits hurt. I ain't thinking of my hundred dollars, nary time, be-

cause I hold that I'll win in this hyer game as easy as turning over my hand."

"Don't crow so loud now; wait until you have won," interrupted the Californian.

"Oh, no; that would be cruelty to animals!" the major declared. "Let him crow now, for after the trick is done he won't have any chance to crow."

"Mebbe you're willing to bet a trifle on that?" cried Soaper, turning savagely upon the veteran.

"Right you air, Jacky, me boy, I'll go you ten thousand dollars on it and put the money up this minute!" and the major dove his hand down into his pocket with as much earnestness as though he believed he had that little amount stowed away in some snug corner. "Put up your ten thousand ducats and see how quick I will cover it—money talks!" and the major, in his endeavor to appear dignified, swelled out like a turkey-cock.

"That's business, every time," the High Horse observed, affecting to believe the veteran was in earnest. "Come, Soaper, go down into your pockets and fetch out your wealth—pony up your ten thousand!"

"Ten thousand!" growled the sport, seeing that the laugh was against him, "I reckon that he couldn't put up ten thousand cents, let alone dollars."

"Oh, you're trying to get out of the bet, now!" cried the major, loftily. "You don't dare to put up the money."

"You couldn't cover it if I did!" Soaper retorted.

"Oh, couldn't I? Well, you jest try, now!"

"I'll go you ten dollars!"

"Aha, oho!" yelled the veteran in derision. "From ten thousand dollars down to ten dollars! Oh, what a fall was there, my countrymen! I disdain your low-down figures; bet me something handsome and I will go at you so quick as to make your head swim."

Soaper turned away with a gesture of contempt, while the major winked knowingly at the crowd, who were highly delighted to see him get the best of the wily sport, who in his time had brought many of those present to grief.

The High Horse approached the animal, followed by the girl.

"Now, King Cole," he said to the African, who stood at the head of the mule, "when I say the word, let 'er loose. I reckon the beast will give you a fair shake, miss, and won't attempt to kick up any didoes until you are fairly on his back."

"Oh, no, sah," responded the black, "he'll stand like a lamb until you tries fur to make him go, and den he's jest ole p'ison on de kick; and as fur bucking, he kin buck worse dan any hoss I eber see'd."

"Up with you then, Posie, and do your level best," the High Horse exclaimed.

Lightly the girl leaped sideways into the saddle, and at the same moment the Californian grasped the mule by the hind legs and cried out:

"Let her go, Snowball!"

The negro obeyed on the instant, and retreated to a safe distance to get out of harm's way, for he expected that the liberty the Californian had taken with the beast would so infuriate him that he would make a clean sweep of the bystanders.

And the negro had calculated rightly, so far as raising the evil passions of the beast was concerned.

The mule gave a shrill squeal of rage, and lowered its head with the intention of kicking into splinters the bold mortal who had dared to lay hands upon him.

For a moment the bystanders fairly held their breath.

They expected to see the Californian knocked into a "cocked hat," as one of them expressed it; but, to their astonishment, the High Horse straightened up, and, despite the struggles of the now frightened animal, held his legs with a grip of iron.

Such a sight no man in that camp had ever beheld.

The mule was really powerless in the hands of the man, and could no more kick itself loose than it could fly.

The girl, from her position on the back of the animal, watched the scene with anxious eyes.

It did not seem possible that a human could possess such wonderful strength.

"Let me know when the five minutes are up, Mr. Timekeeper," said the Californian.

The Dutch saloon-keeper had volunteered to keep the time, but every man in the crowd who possessed a watch had it out.

The mule was exhausted by its struggles before the five minutes had expired, and trembled in every limb, not knowing what to make of this strange creature which was handling him as he had never been handled since the day when he had first frisked over the sod.

"Der five minutes ish betterish gone!" Dutch Jake announced.

"Light down, Posie!" cried the Californian.

Immediately she obeyed the command, and when the High Horse saw she was safely on

the earth he relinquished his grip on the mule's legs, and glad indeed was that sagacious animal to get his hinder hoofs to *terra firma* again, and although the majority of the crowd expected to see him launch a spiteful kick at his conqueror when he got the use of his limbs, they were disappointed, for the mule was wiser than some of the humans who had encountered the Californian.

He knew when he had enough.

"Now then, my gentle friend, I reckon I will rake in that leetle hundred dollars," the High Horse remarked to Jacky Soaper, who plainly showed by his face the disgust he felt at being thus easily beaten.

"Durned if I would have believed it if I hadn't seen it!" Soaper asserted.

Many of the bystanders wisely nodded their heads to signify that they assented to this statement.

"I reckoned you was going to play some trick," Jacky continued, "for I neve' run across a man afore who was able to hold the hind legs of a mule."

"My trick was brute strength; you see I'm considerable of a mule myself!" and then, with a nod to the girl, the Californian sauntered away.

The negro, after vainly endeavoring to get some one to make an offer for the mule, departed with the beast, and again the town relapsed into its customary quiet.

CHAPTER XXI.

TOMMIE'S IDEA.

AGAIN the shades of night had fallen upon Cibola City, and once more the miners flocked into the town on business and pleasure intent.

The three inseparables, as they were sometimes called, Estavan Javali, Jose Camargo and the Indian, Tommie, "were conspicuous by their absence."

Their cronies looked for them in vain in the resorts where they were wont to be found after nightfall.

But when their absence was commented upon, the gossips referred to the quarrel which the three had had with the High Horse, for the particulars of the row near the Fandango Hall had become public property, and it was shrewdly conjectured that the pards, thirsting for vengeance upon the man who had so signally got the better of them, were keeping in the background until they could arrange a plan to wipe out the disgrace which had been inflicted upon them.

And some of the knowing sharps of the town, men who flattered themselves that they were shrewder than their fellows, took it upon themselves to warn the Californian.

Said the would-be friendly counselors:

"They are bad eggs, those three cusses that you peeled so durned roughly the other night, and they are jest like snakes, jest as bitter as p'ison. When they have got into a leetle difficulty with a man, they have been known to wait for a month afore going for him—jest waiting to get good and ready—waiting for a chance to jump on him when the cuss wouldn't have a living show for his monee."

"They hain't shown up in town to-night, and that means mischief—that means that they are a-laying by so as to get a lick at you that will be sure for to lay you out."

This was the general burden of the "song" that the wise sharps sung to the High Horse.

But the Californian only laughed, thanked the counselors for their friendly warning, and said, in his easy, careless way:

"Oh, I reckon you are barking up the wrong tree this time, boys; the fact is the galeots have hauled off for repairs, and they are a leetle ashamed, too, mebbe, that th' y didn't do better in their leetle fandango."

"Threatened men, you know, live long, and if I don't cash in my checks until one of those varmint climbs me, I reckon I'll be good to hold on to a ripe old age."

The sharps shook their heads; it was their opinion that the new-comer held the fies he had made far too lightly, and they felt sure he would ascertain it to be a fact before he was a month older.

And where were the three whose absence from their accustomed haunts excited so much comment?

High up on the side of the heavily-wooded hill, which, at a distance of a Mexican league, overlooked the town of Cibola City, was a small cabin built of roughly-hewn logs, and so sheltered and concealed by the dense shrubbery that surrounded it that a man ignorant of its location might pass within a dozen yards of it and not suspect there was anything of the kind near.

A rough trail, so little used that only an expert woodman would have been able to detect its existence, led in a zigzag course up the hillside to the cabin.

This was the chosen retreat of the three, and on the night when their absence from the saloons of Cibola City excited general remark, the three were in the hut.

One room was all the cabin boasted, and for furniture there was a rudely constructed table

in the center of the apartment; three logs of wood set on end served for stools; and in the corners were three piles of pine boughs covered with buffalo and wolf-skins, the beds of these semi-outlaws.

Upon the table burnt an evil-smelling, spluttering candle, and around it sat the three pards.

Javali had just entered, but the others had spent the day in the cabin.

After their encounter with the High Horse the ruffians had arranged to meet in the solitary cabin and hold a consultation in regard to the best way to get "square" with the victorious, strong-armed stranger.

The first move was to get out their tobacco, and each man rolled a cigarette for himself.

Then, after a few preliminary whiffs, they proceeded to business.

Estavan Javali was the first to speak.

"This is a bad business, my braves," he said, with a wise shake of the head.

"Very bad," observed Camargo, who rarely did more than re-echo the words of the master-spirit of the band.

"Cursed bad!" cried the Indian. "*Caramba!* are we dogs that this North American should treat us so?"

"I'm no man's dog!" responded Javali, fiercely. "And I care not what the color of his skin may be, nor the country from whence he comes."

"That is exactly what I say," chimed in Camargo, "but this giant has treated us as if we were no better than dogs."

"Yes, yes, we must cut out his heart and eat it," observed the Indian.

"I'm afraid that is easier said than done," the master-spirit remarked. "It is the old story of the rats and the cat over again. We must bell the cat or else suffer, but who is to do it and how can it be done?"

The Indian and the Mexican looked inquiringly at each other for a moment and then Camargo said:

"Hang me if I know! If he was any ordinary man I would offer to do the job myself, but this fellow is a regular devil."

"Look ye, Javali! would you believe that there lived a man on earth who could take Tommie and myself by the throat and hold us out at arm's-length just as if we were a couple of pigmy boys?"

Javali shook his head.

"Neither would I. I would have called the man liar to his teeth who dared to assert that such a thing could ever take place."

"Satan's curse light on him!" cried the Indian, who seldom spoke without ringing in an oath. "I fancy I can feel the grip of his iron fingers on my throat now."

"And then when he dared us to attack him, single-handed he beat us without seeming to try. My bones are sore now from the scoundrel's fist."

"Me, too," growled the savage.

"It is plain, then, that as long as this man stays in Cibola City we shall not be able to hold up our heads as we used to do. Our combs have been cut, and our crowing stopped," Javali remarked.

"That's true enough; if he stays we must go," Camargo responded.

"Tommie no go!" exclaimed the Indian in stolid dignity. "Tommie here fore this ladrone come, Tommie stay after he go, but the red-man will have revenge first."

"That is the point, Tommie, that is exactly what we all want, but how can the trick be worked?" Javali said.

"Not easily," Camargo remarked, "unless we get a chance to take him unawares."

"Good! that is what we will do," replied the savage.

"It isn't any trouble to say that," Javali observed, "but how can it be arranged? This man is no fool to walk blindly into a trap. Any snare to catch him must be arranged with exceeding skill."

"Catarina?" answered the Indian.

Javali fancied he understood what Tommie was suggesting, and he shook his head.

"Oh, no," he said, "you will not be able to use her as a lure. She is as obstinate as a mule, and I am sure she would rather die than do ought to bring harm to this stranger, whom she regards in the light of a hero."

"Tommie knows that," responded the Indian, with a cunning chuckle, "but she must not know what she is doing."

"Aha!" exclaimed Javali, struck with the wisdom of the idea, "that might answer."

"Ob yes, that might do," and Camargo put on a wise look, although he hadn't the remotest idea of what the Indian was driving at.

Then at length Tommie explained the plan which he had conceived.

It was extremely simple, yet so cunningly devised that it seemed almost certain to succeed.

"Yes, yes!" Javali exclaimed, when the Indian had finished his recital, "it certainly seems as if the American could be trapped by means of such a scheme."

"Oh, yes, I guess there isn't any doubt that he will walk into the snare without any suspicion that he goes to his death," Camargo ob-

served. "For it is understood, of course, that we are to kill the scoundrel."

"Never will Tommie rest satisfied until he can wash his hands in the best blood of the heart of the North American!" the Indian declared.

"Of course we must not give the man a chance for his life; if we do we will be apt to get the worst of the matter, for this man is by far more dangerous than any whom we have yet encountered," Javali asserted.

And both his companions agreed that this statement was not in the least overdrawn.

Within another hour the three perfected all the details of the plan, and then Javali produced a good-sized jug from under the pine boughs that composed his bunk, and some tin drinking-cups.

The vessel contained a liberal supply of mescal, as the fiery beverage in common use by the lower class of Mexicans is called; the ruffians indulged largely, drinking success to their plan, and then retired to rest to dream that they had accomplished the death of the iron-armed, noble-hearted High Horse.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE FANDANGO.

AMONG the friendly souls who thought it advisable to warn the Californian to beware of the anger of the Mexican was Major Bum.

The veteran had cogitated over the matter, and a brilliant idea occurred to him.

This idea he confided to Dutch Jake, and that gentleman was so much impressed by it that the major succeeded, not only in getting a couple of drinks out of the confiding Dutchman, but also "stood Jake up" for a bottle of whisky to take home with him.

The saloon-keeper was perfectly well aware, having been taught by long experience, that the veteran was a fraud of the first water, yet he was impressed with the idea that the major was one of the longest-headed men in the town.

Possibly this was because the veteran beat generally succeeded in getting the best of him, in fact, fully nine times out of ten.

On a dozen different occasions the saloon-keeper had endeavored to call the major to an account, and had tried to reckon up how much the veteran was indebted to him, but long before the sum total was arrived at, the major, by some clever device, succeeded in bewildering the honest, but stupid Dutchman, and he became so befogged as to be unable to reckon at all.

Then the major would always observe:

"Oh, what is the use of bothering your head about the matter; I like you, you're a gentleman and a judge of good whisky; I s'pose I owe you six or eight dollars; but I'm willing to take another drink and call it squar' at ten, and that's the kind of man I am."

"Ten tollars!" the Dutchman would scream; "by chimney gracious it ish better as dwentys-five tollars!"

"Go 'way!" the major retorted in fine indignation, "you want to charge me with all the liquor you've sold in the last week!"

Then there would be a heated argument, the two would call each other all sorts of names, and a stranger, happening in, would surely have been of the opinion that a deadly conflict must soon take place.

But the two would finally come to an agreement.

The amount of the back debt would be fixed at eighteen or twenty dollars, the veteran paid from fifty cents to a dollar "on account," would have a couple more drinks, insisting upon Jake joining him each time, tell the saloon-keeper to be sure and remind him of the matter the next time he dropped in, as he expected to be in funds on the morrow, and the matter would end for the time being, the whole affair to be repeated from beginning to end the very next time the Dutchman tried to effect a settlement.

The "colossal idea" which the "gigantic intellect"—as he himself termed it—of the major had germinated, was that the Californian should protest against the malice of his foes by surrounding himself with a trusty body-guard.

The High Horse laughed outright when the major, in the gravest possible manner, suggested the idea to him.

"A body-guard, hey?" he inquired.

"Yes, exactly; a brilliant idea, isn't it?" and the veteran rubbed his hands enthusiastically together. "It is not particularly original, I know. If you are a student of ancient history you understand, of course, that all the great men in the olden time had such a thing."

"Even this Mexican scallawag goes about with a gang at his heels, and in order to meet him on anything like even terms you ought to have a party of good men at your back, and you want a captain at the head, who is not only a warrior, but a counselor as well."

"A man like yourself, for instance," said the High Horse, bluntly.

"Well, really, your selection does me too much honor, I fear," the major replied, with becoming modesty. "I was kinder squinting

at a side pard of mine, but now that you speak of it, I reckon I could head the gang as well as any man who could be picked out."

"I don't doubt it in the least, but neither you nor any other man-jack will head any gang of mine as long as I stay in this town," the High Horse replied. "I have two good men hyer," and he held up his muscular hands, "who have always managed to take care of me, and I reckon they will be able to do all my fighting now."

The major affected to be greatly amused by this answer, and informed the Californian confidentially that, in his opinion, he, the High Horse, was one of nature's noblemen, and able to whip a regiment of Mexicans without being obliged to once spit on his hands.

Having established himself on a friendly footing, the veteran immediately proceeded to strike the Californian for ten dollars, but the High Horse "wouldn't have it," as the major remarked afterward.

Then the veteran dropped to five, and then to one, and finally to "two-bits," finding the stranger was obdurate; and upon the major's agreeing never to approach him for a loan again as long as he, the Californian, remained in the town, the High Horse "went a dollar on him."

The major retired with a great deal of dignity, and immediately proceeded to spread the report around town that the Californian had "staked him for a hundred chucks."

The veteran was a firm believer in the truth of the old adage that next to possessing actual wealth is the reputation of having it.

About nine o'clock on the night of the day when the major had revealed his wonderful idea to the Californian, as our hero was enjoying a cigar in the moonlight just outside the Great American Eagle Hotel, a dried-up little imp of a Mexican boy slouched around the corner of the hotel, and approaching the stranger in a stealthy sort of way, asked:

"Are you the Senor Big Horse?"

"I'm sometimes called the High Horse, if that is what you are driving at."

"Yes, yes, Big Horse, High Horse, all the same; here is a note for you, and you are not to tell any one that I gave it to you, for if it was found out I should be beaten black and blue."

"Black, blue and yaller," observed the Californian. "Why, you would be all sorts of colors."

The boy grinned.

"Who is it from?"

"A lady; but I mustn't stay talking to you, for some sharp eyes may see me, and then my back will smart, for the master has a heavy hand," and with a series of grins the boy retreated into the shadows.

The High Horse opened the note. It was in a delicate female hand, and by the light which came from the window of the saloon, in front of which he stood, he perused it.

It was as follows:

"SENIOR AMERICAN:—

"I am threatened with a great peril. Can I call upon your aid again? Your counsel may do wonders for me. I will be at the fandango to-night. I have bribed the lad to carry this message to you, and if you can conveniently come you may be able to do a great service to a poor girl who has no one else to look to."

CATARINA JAVALI.

The High Horse made himself master of the contents of the note, and then he pondered upon the matter.

As the reader has doubtless perceived, the Californian was possessed of a vast amount of shrewdness, despite his extravagant manner.

"Is this a trap?" he queried. "Is the Mexican and his gang at this fandango ready to pounce upon me if I am rash enough to put in an appearance?"

"And if it is so, will they lay me out, or will I be able to perform that little operation upon them?"

"That is a conundrum, and as I'm a master hand at riddles I'll have to try the riddle, jest for greens."

And no sooner had he come to this conclusion than, without saying anything to anybody, he sauntered away toward the Fandango Hall.

As he went along he carefully examined his weapons.

He was not at all sure that the note was from the Mexican girl.

It was in a woman's hand, but as he was not familiar with the writing of the girl, he was not satisfied that she had written it, although her name was signed to it.

Any other woman might have written it as well as she.

"I'll keep my eye peeled, and if thar is fun ahead I reckon I'll be on deck to have my share as well as the next man, and that is the kind of a muskrat I am!"

The fandango was in full blast when the High Horse entered, and the place was so crowded that although he looked carefully around he could not determine whether the Mexican and his allies were present or not.

Neither could he see the girl, though he sauntered down one side of the saloon and closely examined the dancers.

Halting by one of the windows he determined to remain there, thinking to get a better idea of who were in the room than by moving about.

Hardly had he taken up his position, when a young, flashily-dressed girl, with bold, black eyes, and a rather pretty face, although marred by a brazen look, approached him.

"Is the senor looking for any one?" she asked, and, as she spoke, she cast a hurried glance around as though fearful of being observed.

"Well, yes, I was."

"It is the Senor High Horse?"

"So I am called sometimes."

"Catarina will soon be here," she said, in low and earnest tones. "I am her bosom friend, poor girl. She is in great difficulty, and she looks to you for aid. Bend your head, senor, that I may whisper to you without danger of being observed."

The Californian leaned forward, and, as he did so, dextrous hands drew the revolvers from his belt.

CHAPTER XXIII.

IN THE TRAP.

THE trick was so dextrously performed that the High Horse, despite all his caution, was taken completely unawares.

He was alone, unarmed, and without a friend in the room to assist him.

One man against ten determined bravos; for the moment that dark Estavan Javali had sprung the trap, he and his hired ruffians surrounded the stranger and displayed their weapons, while the rest in the room, anticipating a deadly struggle, fled in wild dismay.

The girls screamed in horror and the men fairly tumbled over each other in their haste to quit the scene where but a moment before high mirth had reigned, now that dread murder seemed likely to usurp his place.

As many, women as well as men, went through the windows as by the regular passageways.

The quickest way to get out was what they all sought.

At any moment the carnival of death might begin, and all of them had seen too many affrays not to be aware that the moment the fight commenced, any one in the room was likely to be hit by a bullet, for your revolver-ball is no respecter of persons, and is quite as likely to damage an innocent bystander as the foe for whom it is aimed.

Only one man in the room kept his place besides the High Horse and the Mexican bravos, and that was old Miguel Canarles, the owner of the institution.

With him, fear for his goods and chattels outweighed even considerations for his personal safety.

"Oh, for the love of all the saints! be careful, senors!" he implored. "Go outside, where you will have plenty of room to fight, do not think of waging war here in my pretty place. *Caramba!* think of what it cost me to fit it up. Think of my beautiful mirrors, each one of them worth the ransom of a merchant prince!"

The old man was right about this. The fandango saloon was nicely fitted up, and the mirrors represented a small fortune, for it costs like the deuce to transport such articles through the wilds of the Far West.

"Vamose!" cried Estavan, in answer to the supplications of the proprietor, leveling his revolver at him in a decidedly threatening way.

There was a window just behind where the Mexican stood, and the way the aged don hopped through it was a caution, but from the outside, stretching his body through the aperture, he made one last desperate appeal.

"I am your friend—I have always been your friend, Senor Javali!" he exclaimed. "*Voto a brios!* my house has always been like your own to do with as you pleased. Kill the accursed Gringo—slay him with your pistol-balls and hack him to pieces with your knives; would that he represented all of his race and they could be thus easily disposed of, and so this beautiful land, which rightly belongs to us, could be rid of their hateful presence, but for the love of Heaven do not destroy my costly furniture and expensive glasses!"

"Vamose!" again cried Estavan, sternly, with a wave of his revolver in the direction of the window.

With a hollow groan the Mexican sunk out of sight.

"Oh, they are a set of fiends!" he moaned, as he crouched under the window and listened for the conflict to begin. "What do they care for my mirrors and my furniture, the ladrones—the brigands—the bandits—unbanged rascals, their souls black and their hands red with the blood of a hundred crimes! It is just play to them! They joy in destruction, and over the ruin of honest men they gloat like demons."

"Thank the saints that the American is alone and unarmed, so he cannot possibly make much of a fight, and the scoundrels will not have any difficulty in making an end to him. That is the only chance there is for me. As far as these devils are concerned, if the American was able to offer resistance they would just as lief smash everything in the place in endeavoring to kill him as not."

This was perfectly true, for neither the Mexi-

can nor his gang cared for anybody or anything.

In fact, one and all of them would have been glad of an excuse to play havoc with Canarles's gorgeously fitted-up saloon, urged on only by the spirit of mischief.

But, as the Mexican had remarked, comfortably consoling himself, there did not seem to be much chance for the entrapped American.

What could a single man, unarmed, do against ten stalwart scoundrels, bristling with weapons?

According to all ordinary calculations, the American had not one chance in a thousand of escaping from this trap with his life, so carefully had Javali planned it, and so reckless had the Californian been in regard to danger.

So secure did the arch-plotter feel in regard to his prey that instead of at once attacking his victim he dallied to bandy words with him, as the cat plays with the mouse before devouring it.

"Aha, Senor American, we have you in a tight place this time!" Javali exclaimed in triumph.

"By the Mother of Mercy! you are about as near to death as you will ever come in this life until the very moment when you feel the grim King of Terrors fasten his icy grip upon you!" black-bearded Jose Camargo added, chuckling with ferocious glee.

"Deadwood—deadwood on you this time!" cried the Indian, Tommie. "Fine scalp you hab, it shall dry in the smoke of the red chief's fire!"

And then an ugly chorus of fierce laughter escaped from the throats of the bandits.

In truth the American's situation appeared a hopeless one and yet the Californian did not seem to be in the least daunted.

"Wa-al, you are about the ugliest set of cut-throats I reckon I ever had the misfortune to run foul of in all my born days," he remarked, as he cast his eyes upon the hideous persons of the members of the murderous band.

"The sight of you or'nary cusses is enough to turn the stomach of even a well-regulated yaller dog. Say! what jails have they been emptying 'round hyer, that so many of you critters could be collected in a single gang?"

"Durn me, if thar ain't rope and gallows written on the face of every man jack in the crowd!"

A howl of rage came from the lips of the Mexicans at these candid, if not complimentary, remarks.

But the lip of Javali curled as he listened to the words.

"Don't mind him, my jewels!" he exclaimed. "When a man stands upon the threshold of death it is always considered right to allow him the use of his tongue. It is the sole privilege left to him."

"The American scolds like an angry squaw," added the Indian. "Why does he not fold his hands and meet death like a warrior?"

"Don't you count too sart'in upon my pegging out jest now, you ugly red son of Satan!" retorted the High Horse. "My motto is never to say die until I feel old Death a-tearing right at me, and then I reckon I'll be mighty apt to fight him for all I'm worth."

"I ain't come to the jumping-off place, yet, for all you have put up this little job so neatly. If thar war a hundred or two of you cusses, why, you might talk, but seeing there is only ten or a dozen of you—Bah! I've chawed up that number of men lots of times just to give me an appetite for breakfast—better men, too, than any of you will ever turn out to be, you yaller-skinned, greasy-backed, bean-eating sons of prairie-dogs!"

Another howl of rage escaped from the Mexicans as they listened to these insults, and they looked eagerly at their leader as they brandished their weapons, anxious for the word to be given that the attack might commence.

"Let him taunt on, my braves," Estavan exclaimed, in contempt. "It is his last poor privilege. He has not many minutes more in this world, so let him enjoy them as he may. I warned you, stranger, when you first interfered in my affairs, that it was dangerous. I am not a man to be trifled with, and he who crosses my path had best flee from the wrath to come."

"You've been a marked man ever since you came into the camp," Camargo declared. "From the moment that you dared to lay your hands upon me your death was only a question of time. You are a strong man, skilled, too, in using your fists like the most of you Gringos, but what good does that do you now? You are in a death-trap from whence you will never escape with life."

"Is that so, you black-bearded scoundrel?" queried the High Horse, in supreme contempt.

"And the pretty squaw you tink much of," quoth the red-skin, licking his thick lips with a fiendish relish. "what she do, eh, when you are gone? She will need anodder chief. Aha! the red-man will care on her take. I will carry her off to my wigwam and she shall sing in the lodge—no black boots more."

"You red skunk, that gal will never fall your prey!" Goldlace cried.

"She shall, for I, with my band, will arrange

the matter, and as for the other girl, my stubborn niece, she shall now find the fate for which I destined her, for no longer will she dare to disobey me, encouraged by you in her rebellion!" exclaimed Estavan. "But we are wasting time in this idle talk. If you have prayers to say be speedy, for the end approacheth. Ready, my braves!"

But the word to commence the attack never came from his lips.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE RESCUER.

JUST as he opened his mouth to give utterance to the command, the sharp, quick bark of a revolver sounded on the air.

Five shots were fired in rapid succession, so close together that one seemed but the echo of the other.

The shots came from without the building, and were aimed at the ruffians, who were all huddled together, preparing to spring upon their victim.

A better target mortal man could not have wished.

Not a single one of the shots missed: the open window, right by the side of the braves, afforded an avenue for the balls to enter.

Three men went down in their tracks—two dead, and one badly wounded; two more were winged by the swift balls; and then, as was only natural under the circumstances, the bravos were seized by a sudden panic and turned and fled in wild confusion through the doorway.

The Indian was in the advance, for, although no man ever yet had reason to doubt the courage of the red-skin, still he was a firm believer in the Indian idea that the warrior is a fool who fights when he is placed at a disadvantage if he can possibly escape the conflict by running away.

Black-bearded Jose Camargo was one of the unfortunate unlucky enough to be wounded by one of the shots, and thereby stretched helpless upon the floor, and yet not so unlucky as to draw a death blank in this fearful lottery.

A bullet had "creased" him on the temple, so that he had fallen exactly as the bullock goes down under the blow of the butcher.

Estavan Javali, too, had suffered, having received a bullet in the shoulder, the wound not sufficient, though, to prevent him from retreating with the rest—in fact, he was one of the first men out of the building—but quite painful enough to make him think he had got all the fighting he cared to indulge in at present.

And the moment the bravos emerged from the house the unknown marksman, who was evidently concealed in a small clump of bushes a few yards from the Fandango Hall—the same bushes, by the way, that had afforded concealment to the High Horse on the occasion of his first meeting with the Mexican, Javali—opened fire again on the fleeing bandits.

It was plain there was but a single foe, and possibly the bravos, after they had got out of the range of the fire, might have plucked up courage enough to endeavor to discover and exterminate the assailant who had inflicted such a terrible surprise upon them, had not Goldlace been prompt to come to the assistance of the unknown.

The moment that the ruffians broke and ran, he sprung forward and helped himself to the weapons of the dead and wounded men.

As it luckily happened, Camargo had been the man who had secured Goldlace's revolver, and so he was enabled to recover his trusty tools again.

Then, springing to the open doorway, through which the bravos had fled, he let drive at them as fast as he could discharge the weapons.

The night was rather dark, however, so the bullet did not do any serious damage.

About the only effect was to make the Mexicans display running abilities that would have made a professional foot-racer turn green with envy.

"Talk 'bout grevhounds!" exclaimed the Californian; "durned if these critters wouldn't make the best hounds that ever run on four legs pick up their feet pretty lively!"

A few moments and the bravos vanished in the darkness.

"The picnic is over," Goldlace remarked, recharging his revolvers and taking a look at the dead and wounded men stretched upon the battle-field.

The old Mexican climbed in through the window, and nearly went wild with despair when he found that one of his mirrors had been shattered by a glancing ball.

"Oh, Mother of Mercy! will you look at that!" he cried, grabbing his head as though he intended to tear his hair out by the roots. "Will you pay, Senor American, for the damage?"

"Will I pay?" cried Goldlace, astounded by the question. "Well, I will not, if I know myself, and I think I do. Pay for the mischief done by the cusses that attempted to murder me in cold blood just because I happened to interfere to prevent them from ill-treating a helpless gal! Old man, you are clean off the base."

Your head ain't screwed on right. You ought to go and git it fixed."

"But somebody must pay. I cannot afford to stand the loss!" the Mexican protested. "Caramba! a mirror which cost me a hundred dollars besides the freight!"

"Charge it in to this Mexican and his gang—what do you call him?"

"Javali—Estavan Javali."

"Wa-al, he's the man that ought to pay the piper."

"Oh, he would murder me if I dared to hint of such a thing."

"Ah, would he, and that is the reason why you are afeard?"

"Yes, yes, he is a very bad man; all that offend him die suddenly."

"Wa-al, I've offended him some, and I ain't dead yet, and what is more, I reckon if I don't die until this 'tarnal Mexican cuts my thread of life, I will live to a good old age. But in regard to this hyer damage, don't you go for to bother me about it, or I'll be banged if I don't go for you, red-hot. You think the Mexican is a bad man, but you'll find that he ain't a circumstance to me when I git a-going."

"But it was the bullets of your friend which did the damage. How, then, can I ask Javali to pay?" cried the old fellow, in despair.

"It's a rule of war that the party who gits whipped must foot the bill. The Mexicans were cleaned out, and they must pay the expenses. Go through the cusses and take their wealth, but I reckon though that you won't git no hundred dollars out of them by a jugful; and speaking of my friend, that reminds me that I must find out who the critter was that came so timely to my aid. So long; I'll see you later."

And leaving the angry Mexican to curse the evil luck which had made the contending parties select his Fandango Hall as a battle-ground, the High Horse sallied forth, bent upon discovering who it was that had come to his assistance and rendered such excellent service.

All now was still, the Mexicans had vanished, and but for the smell of gunpowder which still lingered in the air no one would have dreamed that angry mortals had, but a few short moments before, eagerly sought to destroy the life that the Creator gave.

"Come out and show yourself and give me a chance to thank you for the service that you have done me!" exclaimed the Californian, as he approached the bushes.

He was curious to see who his unknown preserver would turn out to be, for he was utterly in the dark, as there was not a single one in the town he could call to mind who would be apt to do him any such service.

Judge of the High Horse's surprise then when forth from the shelter of the bushes stepped the light form of Posie McKinney.

"Wa-al, smash me all to splinters!" Goldlace exclaimed, as the girl made her appearance, a bright smile upon her quick, expressive face, and two self-cocking revolvers in her hands. "I reckon that I am about the biggest fool out of jail! Why, Posie, you dear little gal! I never thought of you, but was bothering my brains to guess who the man was that had plugged the Greasers so handsomely. I tell you what it is, leetle gal, you did the trick as well as any trick was ever done since six and seven-shooters came into fashion."

"Oh, but I owe you so much, Mr. Goldlace, that I fear I will never be able to pay the debt," the girl replied, "and I'm sure I can't explain to you how glad I was when this chance came in my way to serve you. Everything happened so fortunately too. I was sitting by my window just after nightfall; I had not lit any lamp and the window-shutter was so nearly closed that it was impossible for any one to see into the room—in fact, the house looked deserted."

"Some men passing by, stopped within a yard of the window, held a brief conversation, and then separated."

"By it I gathered that a plot had been formed to insnare you and it had been resolved to accomplish your death this very night."

"There was so little said though that I did not ascertain how it was proposed to carry out the scheme nor where it was to take place, but I determined to do the best I could to frustrate it."

"I had no one but myself to depend upon for I was afraid to trust anybody lest I might betray the matter to some one who was in the plot."

"If I could have found you it would have been an easy matter to put you on your guard, but I hunted the town over without finding you, and no one seemed to know where you had gone."

"While I was looking for you I came across a miner who was trying to raise money by selling these revolvers."

"I am familiar with all kinds of weapons, for I learned to shoot when I lived at the fort, and something whispered to me to buy the weapons for they might prove useful, and I did so."

"Hardly had I completed my purchase when a man passing mentioned your name, conversing with his companion, and from what he said I gathered that he had just left you in the Fandango Hall."

"I hurried here at once, and arrived just in time to prevent your murder."

"Wa-al, I reckon you did, leetle one, for a fact," the High Horse admitted. "I was just about as near the great send-off as a man can be and live to tell of it. I never was so skeered in all my life. Lordy! how I would have run if I had only got a fair chance to show the scamps a clean pair of heels."

CHAPTER XXV.

AN EXPLANATION.

"Oh, fie!" and Posie shook her finger reprovingly at the Californian. "I'm afraid that you are telling a whopper when you say that. I will believe that you are afraid and seek to escape from your foes by running away when I see that it is so with my own eyes and not before."

"Wa-al, now, really, Posie, don't you think that gang of scoundrelly Greasers was ugly enough to make any decent critter run? Durn me! if they didn't all smell so strongly of onions as nearly to knock me down."

"Anyhow, Posie, I kin thank you for my life to-night, and I kinder think that balances the account between us."

"You don't owe me nothing now; we are squar'."

"Oh, no, we are not!" cried the girl, quickly, an earnest look in her expressive eyes. "I feel that I am still deeply in your debt. Why, just think; you have transformed me from a dependent drudge into a free woman, able to take care of herself without anybody's assistance. You have made a new life for me, and do you think I shall ever be able to repay you for that, no matter what I may do?"

"Now thar ain't the least bit of use talking 'bout the matter; I consider it settled, and, by thunder! I think I ought to be the one to have the say-so 'bout the thing. Anyhow, if you don't keep quiet 'bout it, you and me'll have a fight."

"Oh, we will not quarrel," and the girl laughed merrily at the idea.

Then the two walked off in the direction of the town.

"Say, do you know, thar's one thing that puzzles me 'bout this hyer Mexican shin-dig," observed Goldlace, abruptly. "What on airth made the Greasers go for me so durned furiously? I've had a growl or two and a leetle fun with some of them since I came to the camp, but nothing to warrant them in going for me so durned savagely. They had evidently made up their minds to wipe me out without regard to the expense, and if it hadn't been for you, I reckon they would have come so confoundedly near it that they would have made it mighty uncomfortable for me."

"I overheard a few words that may explain the mystery," the girl remarked.

"One of the men said, 'He must be put out of the way, no matter how much it costs, for if he once gets on the right track it will be all up with me.' The other said, 'It will be a tough job and one likely to cost us some lives for he is a perfect demon as far as fighting is concerned. Don't you think we had better let him alone? He will not be apt to discover anything and then when he is tired he will probably go off somewhere else.' The other replied—I cannot recall his exact words—but their purport was that you was a bull-dog and would not be apt to become tired and so the trap must be set."

"Posie, I reckon you have got hold of the tail of a rat this time," the Californian exclaimed.

"You remember perhaps that I told you I had come to this section in quest of a certain man who had deeply wronged my sister. In fact that her death lay at his door, and I had come all the way from California determined to get full measure of revenge."

"Oh, yes, I remember; and you asked me if I wouldn't keep my eyes open, and I have. You mustn't think for an instant that I have forgotten a single word you have ever said to me."

The Californian looked askance at the girl for a moment and she glanced up in his face with her clear trusting eyes, very proud and happy that she was able to show him how attentive she had been.

"Yas, yas," he murmured, slowly, evidently rather embarrassed; "wa-al, you remember the name of the galoot?"

"Oh, yes, Aban Vali," she replied, immediately. "It's an odd name, and one which when once heard is not apt to be forgotten. I have been doing the best I can, too, in a quiet way, to find out if there was any such man in the camp, or whether there ever has been, but no one that I came across seemed to have ever even heard of him."

"The cuss has covered up his trail pretty well, thar's no denying that," Goldlace observed. "I went to work quietly myself in the first place, but as I couldn't get a bit of information, I jest changed my tactics, and began blowing 'round the camp as loudly as I could that I was dreadfully anxious to find a man called Aban Vali. You see I was working on this idee: the feller was in or 'round the town somewhar, but he had been cutting up so many didoes that he didn't dare to be known by that name. It is jest as

like as not that it ain't his real one, for from what I know of the galoot, it strikes me that he is the kind of chap that would be mighty apt to have a new name for every town he struck."

"I reckoned that if he was in the town and heered that a gentleman 'bout my size was so very anxious to make his acquaintance, he would be apt to ask himself the why and wherefore of it. The cuss don't know me from Adam, and it would be utterly impossible for him to guess why I wanted to see him."

"His curiosity would be excited, and he would be mightily inclined to try to find out what I wanted of him."

"If he suspicioned that my visit to this hyer camp was for the sole purpose of taking his scalp the moment I could get my fingers onto it, then he would be mighty apt for to try and git me out of the way in some underhand manner."

"Yes, yes, I see, now—I understand!" Posie exclaimed. "That would explain why these men were so eager for your death."

"That is 'bout the way I look at it. The cuss is in the camp—he has heard that I am after him and has taken the alarm. He reckons that I ain't a-bunting him jest for the pleasure of saying 'good-morning.'

"He has got onto it that I am jest old business, every time, and he thought the best way of getting rid of me would be to hire these 'tarnal Greasers to put me whar the dogs couldn't bite me."

"I've no doubt that your guess is correct."

"I feel pesky sure of it. I reckoned that he would go for me if he heered I was arter him, but I will own right up that I didn't expect the cuss to jump his men onto me quite so quick, nor to do the job in such a workmanlike manner."

"I tell you, leetle gal, if it hadn't been for you, I reckon they would have cooked my goose this time and no mistake, for though I'm 'bout as strong as a hoss, yet whar a man hasn't got anything but his bare hands against revolvers and knives, he don't stand much show for his money."

"I can hardly explain to you how glad I am that I was able to be of assistance!" Posie exclaimed, earnestly. "But do you think that you have any clew, now, to the man whom you seek?"

"Wa-al, not much of one, and yet enough, I reckon, to enable me to run him down. I've an idea that my man is one of the big fellows of this hyer camp. He's a foreigner, mebbe a Mexican; in fact, I think the odds are 'bout ten to one that he is of that nation."

"I've been keeping my eyes open, you know, ever since I struck the town, and I find that thar is but a dozen Mexicans hyer who are supposed to be pretty well fixed."

"None of your common galoots, you know, like the miserable wretches that went for me to-night, but fellers that hold their heads 'way up."

"Now I suspicion that my man is one of these big-bugs. He's had a turn of luck, made a pile, and he ain't anxious to be wiped out by an intruding, inquisitive galoot who is nosing 'round after the man who drove his sister into the grave."

The tone of Goldlace's voice involuntarily deepened just here, and the big veins of his temples swelled; these signs boded ill for the betrayer of the hapless American girl if the avenger succeeded in discovering the wrongdoer.

"As I said afore," he continued, after a moment's pause, "I reckon that I have got a sort of a clew."

"The Mexicans must know the man—they must know who it was that hired them to attack me, and when I find out who that is, I reckon I'll be able to put my fingers on the man I want."

"But do you suppose you can induce them to tell you who their employer is?" Posie asked, a little incredulous in regard to this feat.

"Oh, I reckon I can persuade them," Goldlace replied, a grim sort of smile upon his face.

"How on earth will you be able to persuade them?" she asked. "From what I have seen of them I should think they were a stubborn lot of brutes."

"During the brief interview that I had with them just now, I marked the faces of every man in the party, and I will make it my business to have a private talk with every one of them."

"I shall work it so as to git the galoots foul, one after the other, and then they will either tell me what I want to know or else I shall render it so durned unpleasant for them, that afore I git through they will all wish they had never been born."

"Oh, if the man is on top of the airth, I'll find him; don't you be afeard 'bout that. I'll make these durned Greasers tell all they know, or else I'll tickle them to death."

By this time they had arrived in the neighborhood of the hotel, and encountered the veteran major, who had just come from Jacobi's place, in a state of great agitation.

"Aha! me bold High Horse, you are jest the man I want to see!" he exclaimed excitedly.

"There's the deuce to pay in the saloon. A lot of cowboys have come to town and they are threatening to clean out the hull shebang. The Dutchman is almost frightened to death, and I reckon there will be serious trouble unless some man of your heft will step in and talk to them."

"All right, I don't mind chipping in, although I don't know as I've got any call to take a hand in the game," the Californian replied.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE COWBOYS.

"You ain't the kind of man to stand by and see that poor Dutchman ruined, are you?" the major demanded, pathetically.

"Oh, no, he's a good critter enough," the Californian replied, "but I kin jest tell you if he keeps a feller like you a-hanging round him long, it will break him all up."

"Oh, I touch him lightly; besides, I don't allow anybody but myself to fatten on him, and between you and me and the bedpost, I contrive to send him a good deal of trade in the course of a week. It's really a benefit to a first-class place to have a man like myself hanging round, ready to take a drink when a customer feels lonesome. But, I say, you really ought to chip in this time. It will be just fun for you to show these cowboys a trick or two."

"It's a new gang that never struck the town afore, and they kinder think that they kin run the hull entire place."

"Oh, I'll take a hand in the game, for I don't believe in any sich nonsense."

"Haden't you better take my revolvers?" Posie asked; "they are splendid weapons."

"Yes, I will, and gladly, too, just for luck," responded the High Horse. "I'll change with you; you take this pair of mine."

And so the exchange was made.

"Wa-al, good-by for the present," the Californian said, as he shook hands with the girl. "I reckon we are about squar' now, an' I'll have to look for a chance to do you another favor, so as to keep a leetle ahead."

"You mustn't dream of doing that, for I don't wish to be under any more obligation to you than exists at present," she replied, laughing, and then hurried away.

"That is a glorious girl, sir," observed the major, with the air of a judge.

"Oh, yes, you don't scare up much better girls than she is anywhere on top of this airth, I reckon," the Californian responded, looking after the light figure of the girl with considerable pride.

"Right you are, sir, there isn't any discount upon her. She'll pan out one hundred cents to the dollar, every time."

Then the two started toward the hotel.

"This is a pretty rough crowd I should judge from what you said," Goldlace observed.

"About the toughest gang, take them for all in all, that has ever struck the town. We are rather out of the cowboy country hyer, and this is the first gang of them that has ever run into this camp."

"It seems that it was all a mistake, too; they were on their way to one of the towns on the upper trail, but made a mistake and took the wrong road, and that brought them in hyer, and when they discovered that the camp was not used to cowboy visitors, they announced that they would hold a sort of a festival in order that the town might understand just what kind of critters they were."

"I see, kinder introducing themselves."

"Yes, sir, and to use the classic expression they have made Rome howl. I don't think I ever saw so many frills put on by so few men, and with so little to back them, in the same space of time in all my life."

"How many are thar in the crowd?"

"Ten, all told."

"Pretty small gang to undertake to run sich a camp as this hyer."

"No doubt about that; they'll get eternally chawed up when they get outside and the boys get arter them, for I tell you Cibolo City is jest a red-hot camp when she gets b'iling and starts on the war-path."

"How comes it that the cusses had captured the saloon, then?"

"Well, thar was only a few in thar, and the cowboys put a sentinel at the door the minute they got in, so that no one could get out to give the alarm."

"How is it that you got out?" asked Goldlace, surprised at this statement.

"Oh, I played it on the galoots," responded the major, with a grin. "I am an old stager, and the cowboy who picks me up for a flat will get badly left."

"The moment I found that they intended mischief, I pretended to be as full as a tick, and when they told Dutchy they intended to set fire to the place because it was a nice night for a bonfire, I fell out of one of the windows, and the rascals laughed at it for a good joke."

"You see, they thought I was so full that I didn't know what I was about."

"Major, you've got considerable of a head on your shoulders," Goldlace observed.

"Oh, yes, I know enough to go in when it rains, I reckon, and any cowboy smart enough

to fool with your uncle has got to get up very early in the morning."

"Great heavens! jest think, colonel, of the dreadful loss it would be to me if these infernal ruffians should fulfill their threat and burn the saloon. Jake, with all his faults, is a mighty good fellow, and his place is the only one in town that is willing to hang up the drinks for me when I run out of funds."

"Jake is of a confiding nature, you see, and really possesses a love for literature. He swallows a 'ghost' story regularly from me about every morning, and though he growls like thunder, the cocktail is always forthcoming."

"If he should go bu'st, my supplies would be cut off, and then good-by to yours truly."

"Without the inspiration of the soul-elevating, mind-cheering cocktail, I would surely die in a week."

"Yes, sir, in one short week I'd be in a condition to ride in the first coach in a funeral procession, and the weeping town could go and shed the briny tear over my grave, mebbe stick a flower or two onto it, and a suitable inscription might be 'Gone, but not forgotten by every saloon-keeper in the burg. Henceforth the lunch-counters are safe.' Such an epitaph as that would be apt to make some of those Eastern tourist sharps open their eyes."

"Yes, I should imagine so," remarked Goldlace, amused by the quaint idea of the veteran bummer.

"No, sir, these rascally cowboys not only threatened my crackers and cheese and salt cod-fish, but the exhilarating cocktail as well, and I made up my mind to bring the town to the rescue. I may take a bite out of that honest Dutchman myself once in a while, but I'll be hanged if I will let anybody else eat him if I can help myself!" exclaimed the veteran, in righteous indignation.

"Ten, you say?"

"That's all."

"Big fellows and well-armed, I suppose?"

"No, they ain't any of them very big, but they are rougher than all get-out, and as for weapons, upon my sacred word as a man and a judge of good whisky, there isn't one of them who is not a regular walking arsenal. General, they fairly bristle with weapons."

"Kinder a lively party to invite a man to."

"They will probably do their level best to make it interesting for you," the major admitted with a grin.

"What in thunder do you want to corral me into such a round-up for—do you want to get me killed? Is thar a vacancy for a graveyard in the town, and do you want to git me laid out so that you'll have somebody to start it with? Is that your leetle game?"

"Oh, no, we've got a flourishing cemetery up the river, and I will venture to say, for the honor of the camp, that there is probably more men planted in that unprofitable acre, who died with their boots on, than you can scare up in any camp of the same size as this in the known world."

"No, my noble friend and backer, I pitched upon you the moment I saw you because I know what you can do."

"The moment I saw you I said to myself, says I, if there's any critter in this town that can make these rascally cowboys behave themselves like gentlemen, the High Horse is the man."

"I'm very much obliged to you for your good opinion," Goldlace remarked, "and I'm quite willing to do what I can for you, but, honestly, I must say if these ten cowboys will not listen to my words of remonstrance but, rise upon their hind legs in wrath and go for me, I shall run—yes, sir, and run like a fighting jack rabbit the first time a greyhound gits arter him."

"That's it, exactly!" and the veteran rubbed his hands in glee. "Precisely! you couldn't work the trick better—you run and they run after you; that will get them out of the Great American Eagle Hotel, and that is all I want."

"At all hazard, my crackers and cheese, my salt fish and my cocktails, must be preserved."

"Yes, that's all very well, but suppose the cowboys succeed in catching me?"

"Oh, kill the hull boodle of them. It's a matter of perfect indifference to me. I had just as lief you would wipe out the hull gang as not. The woods are full of cowboys; ten or a dozen of them will never be missed."

"The town needs a holiday, anyway; we all work too hard; that is the curse of our American civilization, and if you kill the critters and give us a chance to plant 'em, we'll have the biggest kind of a blow-out."

"Suppose they kill me?"

"Well, we'll do the best we can, of course, but naturally you will understand that we couldn't make as much row over one man as over eight or ten," responded the major, urbanely.

By this time the two had reached the door of the Great American Eagle Hotel, and the sounds of revelry within were plainly discernible.

"Dance, dance, you Dutch son-of-a-gopher, or we'll make it hot for you!" cried a hoarse voice, coming from the saloon.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A LESSON IN POLITENESS.

THE Californian listened for a moment and then turned to the major, and with a peculiar twinkle of the eyes said:

"Do you hear that, major? Haven't you got this thing a little crooked? They appear to be enjoying themselves first rate in thar. Do you heer 'em asking Jake to dance? 'Pears to me as if they was a-gitting on right nice and having the best kind of a time."

"Oh, I hear it!" and the veteran smiled grimly. "Jest wait until you get inside and I reckon you'll find out that if the cowboys are enjoying themselves, it is at the expense of everybody else. Mebbe Jake is a-dancing, but you kin bet your life he wishes he wasn't."

"I hate to sp'ile sport, but I suppose I must chip in," the High Horse remarked.

"If you don't, thar won't be anything left for you to chip into. That's a sure-enough fact and you are safe in going your bottom dollar on it," the major replied, with a doleful shake of the head.

Then the two entered the saloon.

The cowboys were willing enough that any one should come in, although they had decided objections to any one going out.

The scene was really an amusing one that the two gazed upon when they got into the saloon.

Jake was up on the bar-counter, a couple of the cowboys had usurped his position behind it and were dealing out free drinks with a lavish hand, while the rest with cocked and leveled revolvers were menacing the landlord.

"Come now, you durned Dutch elephant!" cried the largest and most fierce of the party, who seemed to be the leader of the rest, "we want you to dance, do you understand? We don't want no monkey business but a reg'lar first-class shindig, and we're going to have it, too, or else we'll jest wade in blood."

"Come hurry up, unlimber your short legs, and give us the saloon-keeper's jig. Be lively about it, or we'll fil this hyer room so full of flying bullets that you'll think a reg'lar hail-storm has broke loose!"

"Oh, mine gootness, gentlemen, how can I dance mitout the moosic?" pleaded the frightened saloon-keeper, anxious for an excuse to escape from this public exhibition.

"Music!" cried the cowboy leader in supreme contempt, "you want music do you, you blasted, pig-headed Dutchman! I tell you what it is, if we commence letting off these shooting-irons 'round hyer, you'll wish that you had concluded to dance without music."

"I hafe not dance mit my feet for years!" exclaimed Jacob in an agony of terror, for in all his experience he had never before encountered such a band of ruffians.

"So much the more reason that you should dance now! You've been gitting rusty, and it's 'bout time that some kind-hearted critters took hold of ye and made ye unlimber. All you Dutchmen know how to dance, and the fact that you ain't willing to oblige the company with a specimen of your skill shows that you are a cussed mean hog."

"Hyer we have been patronizing your bar and a-setting of 'em up right steady ever since we struck the shebang, and you ain't got no decency not to be anxious to oblige sich bully customers as we air."

"I tell yer, old man, you don't strike sich a gang as this every day, so you ought to make much of us and be thankful."

"I'll venture to say that we have h'isted more good old benzine during the short time we have been running this picnic than ary gang that ever struck you."

"But you mans pays not for mine liquor! Vot's der goot of dot kind of trade?" asked the unlucky Jacob, who had not indeed been fortunate enough to see the color of the rascals' money since they entered the place and with the air of men who were not used to being refused, ordered Jacob to "set 'em up."

"Pay!" and the cowboy leader laughed hoarsely, the gang joining in the merriment; "what in thunder do you take us for? Did you ever hear tell of men sich as we are ever paying for anything?"

"No, sir-ee; that ain't the kind of cattle that we are!"

"You might pick us up a thousand times, north or south, east or west, in perairie or in town, and you would never be able to prove us guilty of any sich durned foolishness as that. Do you know who we air?"

"Mine gootness, no," responded the frightened Dutchman, who might with equal truth have added that he didn't care to know, either.

"We're the bosses wherever we go! We're the genuwine long-haired Texan cow-punchers—we're the bully boys that rule the roost and it don't matter two shakes of a steer's tail whar you pick us up, either!"

"We're the howling wolves of the boundless perarie and the tigers of the town. We're the boys that fear no noise, the durnest, ugliest gang that you ever saw when we git on the rampage, but treat us well, let us have every-

thing we want, and in our own way, and you'd think we were jest a playful lot of kittens.

"That's the kind of a crowd we are! Rougher than a b'ar's back if you attempt to rub us the wrong way, but treat us well, and you'll find us the nicest gang in Texas, bar none!"

"Oh, gentlemen; by chiminy Christmas! I always treat everypoddy well!" exclaimed Jacob, casting an appealing glance at the High Horse as much as to ask him to interfere and rescue him from his tormentors. "You shust ask any of der poys. They will all tell you dot I am a square mans, every time!"

"Now how can that be when you hav'n't asked us to drink a single round since we've been in your place, and jest think how many times we have set 'em up."

The cowboy neglected to state that they had not afforded Jacob any opportunity to display his hospitality, for they had incontinently bounced him from behind the bar and forced him to climb to his present position on the counter the moment they had entered the place.

"Is dot so?" asked the saloon-keeper affecting to be greatly astonished, and striving not to appear frightened, although he was trembling in every limb.

"That's the honest, simon-pure truth. You kin round me up for a stray maverick if it ain't so!" the Texan declared, and then he appealed to his comrades to know if it wasn't the truth, and of course every one of the ruffian band declared it as his opinion that the host had been guilty of great neglect and by rights ought to be killed on the spot, and the majority of them flourished their revolvers as though eager to do the job immediately.

The saloon-keeper was now more frightened than ever. And in truth he was in great peril, for the reckless bravos were so much under the influence of liquor that they were quite capable of slaying anybody who dared to brave them.

"Vell, vell, mister mans, I vash sorry—dake a drink mit me now and we'll call it square," said Jacob.

"No, we won't take any drink, and it's too late now for you to attempt to come that sort of thing over us!" roared the cowboy spokesman. "We're gen'lemen, every mother's son of us, and you've hurt our feelings; sides we wouldn't drink with any durned Dutchman, no-how!"

"But we want a dance out of you, that's our leetle gait, and we're going to have it or we'll fill you so full of holes that a pepper-box would be ashamed to look you in the face!"

"Oh, mine gootness!" and the saloon-keeper sunk upon his knees in terror, his legs no longer able to support the weight of his body, and then, in utter despair, for he fully believed the cowboys intended to slaughter him on the instant without mercy, he called upon the Californian.

"Oh, Mister High Horse, I vas a fr'end of yours!" he cried, imploringly. "Vill you rot helup me?"

The strange appellation attracted the attention of the cowboys at once.

"Mister High Horse!" the spokesman exclaimed. "Who in thunder is it a-cavorting around with sich a name as that?"

And then they all glared suspiciously at the Californian, for they guessed he was the man to whom the saloon-keeper had appealed.

"I reckon I'll have to own up to that handle," Goldlace replied, advancing boldly and confronting the gang.

The cowboys surveyed him for a moment in silence, for at the first glance they recognized that he was likely to turn out to be a foeman worthy of their steel.

"Well, you're big enough, anyway, you overgrown giant," ejaculated the cowboy leader.

"Yes, big enough to take my own part generally, that is, if I have any kind of a show," Goldlace replied, in a pleasant, quiet way, and he even smiled in the face of the ruffian.

"How did you git such a durned name?" the cowboy chief demanded.

"I got that on account of the rough way in which I used to ride over and clean out cowboys and sich trash."

"What!" cried the other, amazed and hardly able to believe that he had heard aright, while his followers announced their displeasure by ugly growls.

"Oh, yes, when any cow-punchers come into decent society and attempt to put on frills, I always set right to work and knock 'em out. You fellers are great blowers, you know, but thar ain't as much fight in a hundred of you as thar is in one decent man."

The cowboys were so much enraged at this declaration that they were really at a loss for words.

At last the chief found his tongue.

"Mebbe you think you could knock this gang out?"

"Put up your weapons and I'll thrash the hull of you single-handed!" the High Horse declared.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE CONTEST.

To say that the intruders were amazed at this declaration, would be to very mildly characterize the state of mind into which it threw them,

and as for the rest in the saloon, notwithstanding that the most of them knew what sort of a man the High Horse had proved to be, yet they thought in this present instance he had attempted a feat beyond his powers.

The Dutchman was the exception to this rule; he had so much confidence in the prowess of the Californian that he felt perfectly sure the High Horse would easily defeat the intruders.

"Look a-hyer!" cried the cowboy chief, "I reckon you're jest talking for the sake of hearing yourself talk, ain't you?"

"Oh, no, I mean every word I say," Goldlace replied.

"Go 'long! thar's ten on us hyer—"

"Yes, I know it. I can count ten of the ugliest brutes that I ever run across in one party," the Californian observed.

This bold language astounded the cowboys. In all their experience on the frontier, they had never run across a single man who dared to express his opinion so bluntly.

They had come in contact with opposing gangs, equal to their own in strength, and the two parties had exchanged opinions with the most delightful and refreshing frankness, but the idea of a single man daring to bandy words with them, was something that trenched upon the marvelous.

And yet the boldness was not without its effect. They paused to talk with the reckless Californian, instead of at once jumping upon and crushing him into the dust.

"Stranger, we have pity upon your ignorance," remarked the cowboy leader. "No doubt you're a good man, or else you wouldn't be so durned sarey, but the idea that you, one man, no matter how good you are, can get away with ten of us, is jest onpossible."

"Oh, but you don't take into consideration the fact that of you ten, thar's only 'bout two or three that are good for anything at all. The rest will do to howl and yell and raise a racket, but when it comes to right down hard work, a clip or two will take all the fight out of them, and they'll run at the first chance like so many coyotes when the dogs git arter them," answered Goldlace.

A chorus of angry cries arose on the air from the cowboys at this unflattering opinion.

"You're bound to have it, I see!" retorted the other.

"Yes, if you and your gang can give it to me, which I doubt," the High Horse replied. "I think I shall have an easy job in whipping your hull gang inside of five minits."

"And we kin all come at you at once?"

"That's the programme."

"Oh, we'll chaw you right up!"

"You'll find that I am the toughest morsel you ever tackled when you try it on," the Californian answered.

"No weapons?"

"Nary we'pons."

"Only fists."

"And feet; you can kick as much as you like," Goldlace replied. "Kicking is my best holt, and I don't want that barred out. I calculate that I kin kick two-thirds of you so bad that you'll git sick of the job afore we git close enough to use our fists."

The cowboys looked at each other.

Did the man really mean it, or was it all brag? It seemed utterly impossible, and they began to ask themselves if the challenger could be in his right senses to venture so confidently into such an uneven fight.

"Feet are all right; you kin kick as much as you please," observed the leader of the gang. "But I tell you what it is, stranger, I pity you, for in 'bout five minutes after we take hold of you, you'll be the worst used-up man that ever trod in shoe-leather."

"Don't you worry yourself 'bout me; jest git ready to say your own prayers," the Californian retorted, "for if you fellers will stand up to the rack and take your fodder like men, I'll engage that arter I git through with you the hull caboodle will look as if they had been run through a saw-mill, and jest a common, one-hoss saw-mill, too."

"We've had 'bout enough talk out of you!" the other cried, angrily. "It's 'bout time that we went in to shet that big mouth of yours."

"I'm all ready for you and waiting, you gang of measley-mouthed coyotes. Hump yourself and go for me! Give me a chance to turn you into grease-spots, so that the Dutchman hyer can ile his floor without expense!" the High Horse remarked, throwing himself into position for the fray.

"Put up your we'pons, boys, and climb in on this galoot!" the leader of the gang commanded. "Show him that we're the worst men that be ever run across since he was foaled! We're the kings of the Pan-Handle, the genuine double-j'inted, double-fisted Texan cowboys!"

Obedient to the command, the ruffians thrust their revolvers into their holsters, and their knives into their girdles.

Then the majority of them spit on their hands and "kinder" shook themselves together.

The two men came from behind the bar and joined their comrades.

The Californian took a position with his back

against the door, and on the right he was flanked by the counter, so that his assailants could only get at him in front and on one side. From the position which he had chosen it was impossible to surround him or to attack him in the rear.

The major had skulked behind the bar, and the heads of himself and the Dutchman just appeared above the edge of it at the further end.

The rest of the citizens, who happened to be in the saloon when it had been captured by the cowboys, got as far away from the battleground as possible, intrenching themselves behind tables and chairs, for although it was to be a fight with nature's weapons alone, yet there was no telling how soon or how suddenly the programme might be altered, and revolvers come into play.

And when pistol-shooting begins it is the experience of all who have had any experience in such matters, that the bystanders stand a far better chance of being hit than the principals.

The cowboy chief could not divest himself of the impression that there might be some "gum game" about the matter, after all, although everything looked so fair upon the surface, yet it seemed so utterly incredible that one man would really dare to encounter ten, that the intruder suspected there might be some plot in the matter.

"Mind you, this is to be a fair, squar' fight, ten of us ag'in' this big galoot," he continued. "We would have been willing to have given him a better show than that, but it was his say-so, and when a man chooses his own lay-out, why, he's got no one but himself to blame. But I want you all to distinctly understand that at the first sign of treachery—the first attempt to ring in ary cold deal on us—we'll draw our shooting-irons and let you have it red-hot!"

"Oh, stop your chin-music and go ahead!" the High Horse cried, impatiently: "you've only got one man to face. In fact, I would despise any assistance in cleaning out sich an or'nery gang. I'll skin the hull of ye alive and not half try, either!"

"You'll sing another tune inside of five minutes!" cried the other, as he grouped his followers for the attack.

"Wa-al, you won't, for arter five minutes you won't feel like singing at all," Goldlace retorted, bracing himself to resist the onset.

"Ready, boys!"

"Ready we is!" the gang howled.

"Go for him!"

Madly the ruffians precipitated themselves upon the High Horse, but their very numbers interfered with the success of the attack.

For as they rushed pell-mell at the Californian they got so much in each other's way that their action was impeded.

Their idea was to throw themselves upon their antagonist and bear him to the ground by the weight of numbers, so they did not attempt to strike, but only to seize him.

This afforded the High Horse the opportunity he desired.

His long arms shot out with the regularity of the piston-rod of an engine.

And with each blow a cowboy went down, falling as if he had been struck with a sledge-hammer.

Six men were laid prostrate, the time occupied by the performance of the feat being no longer than it has taken me to write the words descriptive of the marvelous act.

Then with his powerful legs he delivered two tremendous kicks upon the extreme men on each side, and the powerful fellows, like feathers, went floating through the air.

The last two men succeeded in getting their hands upon him, but it was a success that cost them dear, for he grabbed each man by the collar of his flannel shirt and brought their heads together with a shock that resounded all through the room and the men dropped senseless.

For a moment the victor had breathing-time, while the men who were able to scrambled upon their feet.

There were only four out of the ten able to come to time; the rest were "knocked out," so badly hurt that they had no stomach for more warfare.

But what chance had the four when ten had failed?

Goldlace felled them one after the other, and this ended the battle.

"Enough," cried the cowboy leader, "we're whipped men; let up and let us go."

"Pay for what you have taken first!" cried Goldlace, sternly.

"We've no money—clean bu'sted!"

"Take their we'pons, then, major!" the Californian commanded.

CHAPTER XXIX.

AN UNEXPECTED MESSAGE.

THE major performed the duty of disarming the cowboys with alacrity and skill and piled the motley collection of weapons on the counter, much to the delight of the honest Dutchman.

"I say, poys, it was betterish goot dot de next time you come mit you mine house inside dot you stay mit your own beeples at home;

how high was dot a'ready, hey?" Jake exclaimed.

"And now git!" exclaimed the High Horse, "and tell your friends when you meet 'em that this hyer camp is the hardest kind of a place, and we make no more of chawing up a dozen or two of cowboys in this town than if they were so many rats."

"Tell 'em that Cibolo City is a tough place to tackle, and warn 'em that the gang that comes in hyer thinking to capture the camp, I'd better purchase their coffins and make all the needful arrangements for their funerals afore they start, for this hyer is the place whar all the cyclones start from, and it's mighty on-healthy for strangers to attempt to put on any frills."

"Pard, you are jest old lightning, and you kin bet all the wealth you've got in the town that this hyer gang will never come within a hundred miles of the place ag'in if they kin help it," the cowboy captain replied, and then the discomfited crowd departed, some of them suffering so severely from the effects of the sledgehammer-like blows of the Californian that they had to be almost carried by their more fortunate companions.

"Sapperment dot was der best bully fight dot I ever see'd mit mine two eyes!" the saloon-keeper declared. "I vill bet you two dollars and a halof dot crowd knows some t'ings more dan they did when they come into my housen out."

Loud were the congratulations the bystanders showered upon Goldlace for his magnificent achievement.

"By chimney Christmas! if I had know'd dot der gang was so pigeon-hearted, I would mine-seluf have cleaned dem out mit der bung-starter!" Jacob declared, and this announcement provoked a yell of derision from the rest.

"Oh, you're a bully fighter," said one.

"With his chin," added another.

"Kin whip the biggest kind of a man—in his mind!" cried a third.

"Better keep quiet, or he'll sail in and clean us out," suggested the fourth.

"Oh you wrong our gentle Dutchman," urged the major. "He wasn't afraid of that gang! I know for a sure enough fact that he had hard work to keep his hands off them, all the time they were hyer. If he hadn't been anxious not to have any disturbance in his house he would have killed the hull lot with the bung-starter right at the beginning."

"Dot was so," exclaimed Jake, who did not "tumble" to the fact that the major was chaffing him. "I had dot bung-starter in mine hand dwo or dree times; I was all ready for to let big feller hafe one chunk in der head, when he so excited me by asking me to dance mine-seluf, dot I forgot dot bung-starter, completely. Well, das was all right; we cleaned dem out. I stand treat for der gang. What you have, poys?"

When the news of this exploit became the common property of the town, the High Horse was at once a greater hero than ever, but he bore his honors modestly.

"Don't say a word about it," he replied, when questioned upon the subject. "I didn't go for to git into the fuss of my own accord. I was kinder d'agged in, for I was afeard the cusses would take it into their drunken heads to burn down the saloon, and if a fire should once get started hyer, I reckoned it would be 'good-by, Cibolo City,' so I chipped in to do what I could."

"The gang was like all such gangs, though; when they come howling into the town that they are going to run the camp or else smash everything to 'tarnal splinters, the chances are 'bout ten to one if a single cool-headed man faces 'em, he kin make 'em dust, lively. They are 'most always a set of cowards; if they wasn't they wouldn't 'come into a camp in that way."

Nothing of note affecting our hero or his fortunes occurred that day, but after nightfall he was approached by a Mexican boy as he was standing on the outside of the hotel, who in a mysterious way drew him to one side and said that he had an important message for him.

Now, as the Californian didn't take much stock in Mexicans big or little, old or young, he was mistrustful of the youth, although he did not allow the other to see it.

"You will not tell any one what I am going to reveal to you?" said the boy, mysteriously.

"That depends upon what it is," Goldlace replied, evasively. "If it don't concern anybody but myself, why, it will be all right. I ain't a-going 'round telling my business to everybody."

"It more closely concerns you than any one else, but the man who sends me would not like any one to know that he has put himself in communication with you."

"Oh, as far as that goes, he can depend upon me to keep my tongue still."

"I am the brother of Joe Camargo, Black-bearded Jose, you remember him? He is the man with whom you had the quarrel in the Great American Eagle saloon."

"Yes: he and the Injun were in cahoots."

"Exactly, senor."

"I remember him, and I reckon he 'got hurt in the fight at the Fandango Hall the other night."

"Oh, he did, senor; he is dying," replied the boy, mournfully.

"Dying! you don't say so?"

"Yes, senor; he has been examined by the doctor and he says there isn't any hope. The wound is mortal and death may come at any time."

"Wa-al, now, that's pretty steep," Goldlace observed, reflectively. "I don't know much about your brother, and what little I do know isn't apt to make me feel particularly friendly to him, but I'm sorry he's going to kick the bucket, all the same."

"His conscience troubles him."

"His conscience! has he got sich a thing?"

"Yes, senor; he has seen the holy father and has been advised to do all he can to atone for the wrongs he has done."

The Californian had become pretty well acquainted with the history of Black-bearded Jose during his brief sojourn in Cibolo City and he could not help thinking—although, out of respect to the feelings of the relative of the wounded, he did not put his thoughts into words—that if Camargo remained alive until he had squared up all his past offenses, the day of his death would be far distant.

"Yes, yes; that's 'bout right, I suppose. In such a time as this, these Gospel sharps gineral-ly come pretty close to the right thing."

"My brother wishes to see you; he has something important to communicate—something which you, no doubt, will be very glad to hear."

The High Horse pricked up his ears, figuratively speaking, at this.

"Is that so?"

"Oh, yes; it is truth that I am speaking. You have been attacked with great bitterness since you have come into this camp?"

"Yes; a man would be safe in betting high on that."

"Attacks are not made without reason. It costs money to hire bravos."

"Oh, yes; fighting must be paid for; the laborer is worthy of his hire."

"You are a stranger; who in this town cares whether you live or die?"

"No one, I reckon, except thar may be some man who thinks my presence hyer bodes danger to him."

"Exactly," and the boy nodded shrewdly. "Jose told me to say all these things to you so that you could clearly understand how matters are."

"If I guess correctly, then, Jose and his friends have been hired to attack me?"

"Yes, and a big price paid. Mexican bravos are not fools. If they fly at big game, they must have a big price."

"I didn't really know that my carcass was so durned valuable."

"You came to this town in search of a certain man?"

"Sure as shooting!"

"You have not found him?"

"Nary time, nor the least trace of him, although I had a suspicion when these ferocious attacks were made upon me that the man I was arter was at the bottom of the hull business."

"That guess is correct."

"I reckoned it was."

"The man you seek is called Aban Vali."

"That's the identical critter!" responded the High Horse, eagerly, a hope springing up in his heart that at last he was going to strike upon the trail.

"He is the man who hired my brother and his friends to attack you."

"The critter is in the camp, then?"

"He is, but not known by that name."

"I suspicioned that, of course."

"And now that my brother is on his death-bed, he proposes to, in a measure, requite the wrong he attempted to do you by revealing the true name of the man who desired your death, so that you will be able to see him personally and call him to an account."

"Wa-al, if he will do that, I'm willing to give him a clean bill of health as far as I am concerned, if that will be of any use in smoothing his passage into the other world."

"And there is another secret—there is a child?"

"A child!" and the breath of the High Horse came hard and fast.

"Yes, and that is one reason why this man, who keeps so completely in the background, is anxious to thrust you out of the way."

"He is afraid that I will take the child away? The 'tarnal skunk! Let me come face to face with him once, and then we'll see what we will see," and the Californian closed his hard fists in a menacing manner.

"If you will come with me I will take you to my brother."

"Sart'in, go ahead!"

This might be a trap, but Goldlace was a man without fear.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE COWBOY CAMP.

A MORE disgusted lot of men than the vanquished cowboys as they filed out of the Great

American Eagle Hotel and took their way through the town, the camp of Cibolo City had never seen.

Some of the strangers had been handled so roughly that their more fortunate companions were obliged to almost carry them. The citizens, attracted by the news that the High Horse, single-handed, was engaged in a fight with "twenty" cowboys in the Great American Eagle Saloon—thus rumor always exaggerates—flocked in great numbers to the scene of conflict, and when the strangers came forth—"whipped clean out of their boots!" as one excited and enthusiastic miner expressed it, the joy of the townsmen knew no bounds.

"What do ye think of this hyer camp, anyway?" queried one, as the cowboys stalked down the main street, glaring sulkily at the jeering bystanders.

"I reckon you 'uns hev diskivered that it is a heap of a camp, arter all," another citizen suggested.

"Went for wool and got shorn!" cried a third, and there were twenty such remarks addressed to the vanquished braves, who but a short hour before had "taken the town" in true cowboy style.

The wild riders did not attempt to reply to the taunts lavished so freely upon them.

They were whipped men, and there wasn't a crow in the whole party.

It was bad enough to be thrashed, but the idea that ten of them had piled on one man and then had been ignominiously defeated was perfectly appalling.

These cowboys were good men too, as men go on the prairies and in the mountains of the wild West; they had taken part in many a pitched battle, fought to the bitter end with both nature's weapons and the destructive implements that the art of man has invented that life may be more easily destroyed.

But in the records of the past no such crushing defeat as they had experienced that night was noted.

Every jeer of the sarcastic crowd struck home, and each taunt rankled like a barbed arrow, but they were whipped men, defeated on a battleground of their own choosing, and by a foe whom they ought to have conquered without the slightest difficulty.

Then, too, they were weaponless, and so they did not attempt to reply to the gibes of the citizens, but slunk through the town in hang-dog fashion.

Glad enough, too, were they when they reached the end of the street and emerged from the town into the open country.

The citizens escorted them to the very edge of the camp, and fired a volley of parting remarks after them.

"Good-by, boys; come ag'in when you can't stay so long!" yelled one.

"So-long, pards; when you sail in on 'Now I lay me,' to-night, don't forgit to put in a good word for the camp of Cibolo City!" exclaimed a second.

And there were a dozen observations of this kind hurled after the discomfited men as they retreated.

Never a word in reply said the cowboys, but when they got out of earshot of the citizens, simultaneously they all gave vent to a groan.

"Durn it all, boyes!" cried the leader of the party, Wamego Billy by name, "if this don't beat my time all holler!"

"I've been in some tough tussles since I took to the rolling perairies, but this hyer work to-night lays 'way over the deck," observed another.

"Right you air, pard," remarked a third one of the gang. "I've seen some good men since I war hatched, but this big galoot is a head and shoulders ahead of the heap."

"And we had the town dead to rights, too," mourned the leader. "Thar warn't a sucker in the outfit that dared for to say hoo! till this big cuss chipped in and called the turn on us."

"I reckon this hyer crowd kin never come in and climb this hyer camp ag'in," remarked a cowboy who was limping along, aided by a comrade's arm.

"Not much!" growled the leader, Wamego Billy. "After this hyer fight to-night, and the cussed way in which we got cleaned out, I reckon thar ain't a ten-year-old boy in the camp who wouldn't be apt to think he could lay us out if we cavorted into the place with the idea of putting on any frills."

"Tell you w'ot it is, pards," said another one of the party, a little bow-legged fellow, who had not previously taken part in the conversation, and had been so backward in the fight as to come off almost entirely unharmed, bearing only a most beautiful pair of black eyes as proof that he had encountered the muscular fists of the Californian, "we worked the trick wrong, right from the beginning. We had no business to come into the town on foot. We ought to hev rode into it on our hosses. Take me off my boss and I ain't worth shucks; no, sir-ee, a cowboy without a hoss ain't worth a durned cent!"

"You ain't worth much, anyhow!" returned Wamego Billy, who did not have a high opinion

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE HIGH HORSE IS CALLED TO AN ACCOUNT.

of either the prowess or the wisdom of the bow-legged man, who was, however, one of the best riders in the party, thanks to the peculiar way in which he was built. "It only required a single smack to knock all the fight outen you, and then you tuck water in the worst kind of way. I never see'd a man crawfish so badly in all my life."

"That's so—that's so!" exclaimed a couple of the others, glad of a chance to find fault with somebody.

The cowboys, smarting under their ignominious defeat, were anxious to wreak their spite, and so they all fell to abusing the bandy-legged man, who made a vigorous defense for a time, but was at last silenced by the universal attack.

The cowboys had gone into camp in a little clump of timber about a mile from the town.

There was just an even dozen in the party.

Two of them, the actual captains of the gang, had remained at the camp to take care of the horses, while the others went on their "hurrah" into the mining-town.

Jack Robinson, Red Jack, as he was commonly termed on account of his red hair and beard, a man of thirty-five or thereabouts, a splendid specimen of manhood, was the main captain, and Charley Mauger, Texas Charley, was second in command.

The Texan was six feet tall, straight as an arrow, lion-limbed, weighed two hundred pounds, and yet was as spry as a cat.

In fact, two better men than Red Jack and Texas Charley it would have been hard to discover all along the line of the frontier.

The pair were generally at the head of the cowboys on all occasions, but on the night of which we write, just after going into camp, a dispute had occurred between the two as to which was the best poker-player, and so they had set down to settle the question, after supper was dispatched, while their companions rode off to astonish the mining-camp.

The dispute in regard to the card-playing abilities of the two had not been settled when the vanquished cowboys made their appearance.

Neither one could boast of much more skill or luck than his adversary, for there was only five dollars' difference between them, and both had become heartily sick of such an uninteresting game by the time the rest of the gang came into camp.

The cowboys had kindled a roaring fire for the purpose of cooking their supper, and the card-players kept it going so the flames might afford them light for their game, though by the time the raiding-party reached the camp the moon was out so full and bright that everything was almost as visible as by day.

The contestants looked up in surprise as the discomfited cowboys made their appearance, their demoralized condition giving ample proof that instead of "taking the town," the town had taken them.

"Thunder and lightning!" cried Red Jack, as he gazed upon the bruised and battered men, "whar on earth hev you fellers been, and what kind of a tornado did you strike?"

"A reg'lar norther, for sure!" Texas Charley remarked. "Wa-al, wa-al, I wouldn't hev believed it if I hadn't seen it with my own two looking eyes. Say, w'ot kind of a durned gang did you run into, anyway?"

"I reckon we'll have to acknowledge that we've been tetotally chawed up," Wamego Billy replied, as he helped himself to a seat by the fire, his companions following his example, a sulky and disgusted crowd.

"I reckon you will," Red Jack rejoined, his amazement increasing as he surveyed the men and saw how badly they had been punished, for there wasn't one of the cowboys that did not exhibit marks of the High Horse's muscular powers upon his person.

"Durn my cats!" cried Texas Charley, "if you ain't the worst-looking crowd I've sot eyes on for a dog's age; w'ot kind of a town hev they got over yander?"

"Must be a mighty lively place I reckon, from the looks of you galoots," Red Jack interposed. "How did it happen, anyway? Did the hull town rise an' climb ye?"

"Whar in thunder are your we'pons?" roared Texas Charley, his keen eyes at this moment discovering that there wasn't a man in the party who could boast of being heeled. "You had a plenty of toothpicks and barkers when you left the camp. 'Tain't possible that you've been fools enough to 'blow' them in at some game and git completely cleaned out, and then everlastingly salivated arterward for squealing 'bout it?"

"Our we'pons are all in the camp yander," and Wamego Billy jerked his right thumb in the direction of Cibolo City, whose lights could be plainly distinguished.

"Put 'em up for drinks!" ejaculated the bow-legged man.

"What?" cried Red Jack, springing to his feet in wrath.

"How?" and Texas Charley placed his arms akimbo and glared at the sheepish-looking men.

"It's a sure enough fact," Wamego Billy admitted, "and I was going to spit out the hull yarn if this durned big-headed galoot hadn't been so 'tarnal eager to shoot off his mouth," and he glanced in scorn at the bow-legged man, who returned the glance with interest. "This hyer hull outfit has been taken into camp in the worst possible way. It jest beats anything I've ever heered tell on, and I've been a-rustling 'round this hyer country ever since I was knee-high to a jack-rabbit."

"And all on yer, ten men—ten big men—ten good men, who ought to be able to whip a hundred ordinary galoots, gi'n up your we'pons to the man what runs a gin-mill shebang? Wa-al, I'm flabbergasted, and I don't keer who knows it!" and in order to give due emphasis to the remark, he brought his muscular right hand down upon his thigh with a smack that resounded like a pistol crack.

Red Jack was evidently excited.

"It beats me clear to death," Texas Charley observed, fully as much exasperated by the untoward circumstance as the chief of the band. "Many a time since I took to cow-punching, I've ridden into a town, tackled the liveliest shebang in the place and ordered the drinks set up for myself and my gang, and set up as often too as I liked. If I had the ducats and keered to shell 'em out, well and good; if I didn't have the coin and was clean bu'sted, I told the shebangist to 'hang 'em up,' and they were hung up, too."

"If the cuss squealed or kicked, I gi'n him a choice atween doing of it or else trying a leaden pill, or a nice little dose of six or eight inches of cold steel, and nary one of 'em yit ever had the pluck to try my medicine; but as to putting up my tools for drinks, cuss me if I wouldn't rather fling them into the river, 'cos that would be acting like a white man; but to pass over your we'pons, why, pards, it was not only throwing mud at you, but a-rubbing of it in. You make me feel mean when I think that I'm a part of the outfit."

The cowboys shook their heads in a dismal sort of way, and some of them groaned a bit; it was tough enough to have to stand such talk and not be able to make a good defense.

"Thar ain't the least bit of use to mince matters or to attempt to beat about the bush," Wamego Billy admitted. "We went in to give the camp a taste of the genuine Texan cowboy, and we was a-doing of it up to the handle, too, when all of a sudden we slipped up and got salivated—awfully salivated—and thar ain't no two ways 'bout it. But, in course, you see it's a sure enough fact, by jest casting your optics over the gang. I reckon we all on us look as if we had been tackling a first-class thrashing-machine."

"You kin bet your bottom dollar on that," Red Jack rejoined.

"Oh, yes, we'll take your word for it. You're 'bout as used up a crowd as I've seen in a month of Sundays," Texas Charley added.

"Any man kin see with half an eye that you must have struck big odds," Red Jack remarked. "I suppose the town wasn't used to cowboy tricks and rose at ye. I know how it is; I run into jest such a hornets' nest once myself."

"How many were at ye, anyway?" Texas Charley asked. "Cuss my cats if it don't look as if somewhar 'bout a hundred had piled onto ye."

"Yes, how many?" Red Jack demanded.

The cowboys looked at each other in the most sheepish manner possible, and the captains surveyed them in amazement, not knowing what to make of their strange behavior.

"Was thar sich a crowd that you couldn't count them?" Texas Charley asked.

Wamego Billy burst into a loud laugh, evidently forced, while the rest grinned a sickly smile.

"Oh, thar wasn't a mite o' trouble 'bout the counting, seeing that it only took one sucker to lay out the hull gang."

"One man!" yelled Red Jack.

"One man!" fairly howled Texas Charley.

The captains could hardly believe the evidence of their own ears.

That a single man could "get away" with these ten muscular cowboys seemed utterly incredible.

"Oh, come, boys, you are laying it on too thick now," Red Jack protested. "I kin swallow almost every kind of a yarn, but this hyer one-man story is a leetle too tough!"

"Oh, yes, too thin entirely," Texas Charley asserted.

"Pards, it's the solid truth and nothing else," Wamego Billy replied. "Jest hold your hosses for a minute and I will tell you all 'bout it, and the rest of the outfit will take their oath that I'm giving it to you as straight as a string."

"Wade in!" commanded Red Jack.

Then the cowboy related the story of their adventures in Cibolo City.

Told how they had captured the saloon and were enjoying themselves with the Dutchman in

tip-top style, when the big stranger put in an appearance; described how he had offered to whip the whole gang, and the scientific manner in which he accomplished the feat when his challenge was accepted.

"And he made you fork over your we'pons jest as if you were a lot of cowardly coyotes?" Red Jack exclaimed, his lip curling in contempt.

"Cap, we were whipped men, whipped in the worst kind of a way," Wamego Billy replied. "I reckon thar wasn't a man of us that wasn't willing to crawl out of the scrape in 'bout any kind of way. I tell you, Cap, I've been in some pretty hefty knock-down and drag-out fights in my time, but I never was handled so before in all my life."

"This hyer man that we tackled ain't a man at all—he's more than human. When he smacked a man it was like the kick of a hoss. Durned if he didn't give me a pile-driver that seemed to lift me clean off the floor—yes, sir, you can bet all your wealth on it; I went flying through the air jest like a bird, and when I lit I came down so cussed hard that my head made a dent in the board!"

And the rest of the gang nodded as if to assent to the truth of this statement.

"One man git away with ten of you?" Texas Charley remarked, withering contempt in his face and voice.

"Yes, one man; that is what I said and I sticks to it," Wamego Billy replied, doggedly. "But I tell you, Cap, you never run afoul of sich a critter since you came onto this hyer foot-stool!"

"Bosh!" cried Red Jack, in supreme contempt, "w'ot kind of talk are you trying to give us? The fact is, when you come right down to the truth of the matter, the feller stampeded you. He was a leetle handy with his fists and you were on strange ground, ready to break and run at the first chance. I reckon if either Texas or myself had been thar, the thing wouldn't have happened."

"Mebbe not; thar's no telling who is governor until arter election," Wamego Billy replied. "But I kin jest tell you that we-uns wasn't hankering for any more of the big galoot arter we got properly introduced to him."

"Say, Texas, shall we stand this kind of a racket?" inquired Red Jack. "Shall we, the captains of this hyer outfit, have it go round the country that our gang was badly whipped by one man?"

"Not by a durned sight," replied the other, promptly. "I'm for satisfaction from the word go!"

"That's the kind of a man I am," remarked Red Jack, with a look of contempt as he gazed upon his defeated and disgraced men. "I reckon I could never hold up my head high enough to look even a yaller dog in the face if this hyer outrage wasn't wiped out."

"I'm for this High Horse, or w'otever he calls himself."

"You kin jest count me in, too," Texas Charley observed, rising to his feet. "If things have got so bad that a single man kin put ten cowboys on the run and make 'em hunt their holes, I reckon it's 'bout time that gen'lmen give up cow-punching and went into some other business."

"Clerking in a grocery store or juggling tumblers ahind a bar might do," and then he added reflectively: "but none of you durned galoots would be worth shucks in a saloon, though, for even a barkeeper must have some leetle sand, a grain or two anyway, jest enough to sw'ar by."

"Oh, this thing has got to be squared up, thar's no two ways 'bout it!" Red Jack cried, impatiently. "Come along, Texas, let's pay a leetle visit over to yander camp and find out w'ot this critter of a High Horse is made of, whether he's flesh and blood, or a walking cyclone in the shape of a man, cavorting 'round jest for the purpose of making mincemeat out of cowboys."

"I'm with you, pard, every time."

"Wa-al, I s'pose some of us ought to go along so as to get a chance to see the fun," Wamego Billy remarked, also rising, his example being followed by all of the cowboys with the exception of the three badly wounded men, who had all they wanted of the Californian, as one of them observed, and were not at all anxious ever to catch sight of his face again.

"We'll leave you hyer to look arter the camp while we take a crack at this hyer big b'ar of a man who feeds on cowboys," said Red Jack. "So, boys, all you-uns that are anxious to see Texas and myself chawed up for keeps, fall right into the procession."

Then off the two captains started followed by seven of the cowboys.

But hardly had the party quitted the little clump of timber in which their camp was pitched when a couple of figures, about half a mile distant on the prairie, attracted their attention.

"By the great horned snake of Taos!" cried Wamego Billy, "if thar ain't the very identical critter now! Thar he is, pards, that's him, that big feller yonder."

"Durn me if this ain't what I call luck!" Red

Jack exclaimed. "Come on, boys, and we'll round up this pilgrim!"

Striking off in a direction to intercept the stranger, in ten minutes the cowboys came within speaking distance.

"Hold your hosses, stranger, we've come to hev a little talk. Are you prepared to step up to the captain's office and settle?" Red Jack cried.

CHAPTER XXXII.

ANOTHER ENCOUNTER.

"STEP up to the captain's office and settle, hey?" the High Horse rejoined. "I reckon you hit me whar I live every time you spit out anything like that. Thar never was sich a cuss for stepping up to all sorts of captain's offices and doing all kinds of settling as a man jest about my size. Oh, I'm the boss settler from Settler-ville, and don't you forget it! Jest put a pin in your memory at that pint and jab it in for all you're wuth!"

The Californian was prepared for the encounter, for, thanks to the ample light afforded by the moon, he had perceived the cowboys at the very same time that they had caught sight of him, and being gifted with the eyes of a hawk, he had recognized that the men were the same with whom he had had the "little difficulty" in the Great American Eagle Saloon, and he had easily conjectured, when he saw them change their course in order to intercept him, that mischief was afoot.

The High Horse was not taken unawares. The trusty self-cocking revolvers were out, and as they were seven-shooters he felt that he held at least a dozen lives in his hand, while there were only eleven in the attacking party.

But the Mexican boy, the guide who was conducting the Californian, was frightened almost out of his wits.

"Oh, senor!" he cried as he beheld the desperate-looking cowboys approach, "we have run into a gang of cut-throats, and we shall both be murdered!"

"Nary time," the Californian responded; "the boot's on the other leg; we're the cut-throats, and these chaps are the victims. If any one of them dares to look crooked at me I'll wipe out the hull gang afore you kin say scat!"

But the boy was not at all tranquilized by this assurance, and as the cowboys came up he slunk in terror behind the Californian.

The two cowboy captains surveyed the stranger with eager curiosity as they approached.

He was a big fellow certainly, but yet not the giant that the pair expected to see from the description that had been given.

When the cowboys got within about fifty feet of the High Horse, he commanded them to halt, at the same time displaying the revolvers which he had kept concealed by his side.

"Whoa, you mule-skinning, cow-punching, Maverick-stealing sons of Satan!" he cried, bringing the revolvers to bear in menace.

"Don't come too close! I'm an awful man for fresh air, and hate a crowd worse than p'isen!"

The cowboys promptly obeyed the injunction, and the two captains naturally clapped their hands upon their weapons.

The Californian's quick eyes saw the motion, and speedily cried check.

"Hold on thar!" he exclaimed, "don't go to fingering your shooting-irons, don't, I beg you; it won't be healthy for you if you do. I'm an awful nervous cuss, and when anybody pulls pistols when I am around, it's apt to make me feel sick at my stumjack; and if you do it I shall be compelled to bore a hole right through the imprudent man. I should hate like thunder to do it, too, for I know there's a lot of poor hangmen who are calculating to turn an honest penny by choking the life out of you cusses one of these days."

By this time the cowboy captains had come to the conclusion that the job for which they had booked themselves was decidedly more difficult than they had anticipated.

The stranger was evidently game to the backbone, skilled, too, in the use of weapons, and not disposed to show the white feather, despite the odds which existed.

But the pair had "enlisted for the war," and were not going to let the stranger back them down by words alone.

"Say, you, mister man, don't be shooting your mouth off quite so freely," Red Jack replied. "I reckon afore you could cock those revolvers of yourn, we would be able to git a pistol or two out!"

"Oh, yes, we're on the shoot, sometimes, you bet!" Texas Charley added.

"Now, stranger, that is jest whar you are barking up the wrong tree," the High Horse rejoined. "These hyer beauties are self-cockers and I reckon that afore you could git your tools fit for action I could have a heap of fun with you."

The cowboys looked at each other and Wamego Billy nodded to the two captains as much as to say:

"Didn't I tell you so?"

"Stranger, if I ain't wrong in my prognosis, you're the cuss that climbed these hyer pards of

mine a short time ago in a way they despised," Red Jack observed.

"Yes, yes, I reckon I'm the man," the High Horse replied, complacently. "The fact is you cowboys git a leetle too free once in a while when you strike a clearing, and you need to be battered so as to make you behave yourselves."

"There may be two opinions in regard to that," Texas Charley rejoined.

"Sart'in, thar mebbe, but it was my opinion to-night that your pards were altogether too fresh and so I jest went in and salted them, and I reckon thar ain't any of them hog enough to say I didn't do the job up prime."

Texas Charley had been surveying the Californian closely, and had come to the conclusion that he ought to be a match for him.

"Say, stranger," he exclaimed, "me and my pard hyer are the captains of this outfit, and we ain't satisfied with the way you have handled our gang."

"Wa-al, they're satisfied," broke in the irrepressible High Horse, "or at least they were when they dusted out of the saloon; thar wusn't a man of 'em that intimated that he wusn't satisfied. They cleared out as mild as lambs."

"Oh, that's all right!" cried Red Jack. "I don't doubt you got away with the hull outfit, but me and my pard hyer are reckoning that you can't get away with us."

"Now you are shouting! Is it to be for money or fun, and how will you have it, fists, pistols or cold steel? I'm your meat, any way you like."

The prompt acceptance of the challenge rather bothered the cowboy captain, who hadn't exactly made up his mind which was the best way to take the stranger.

Texas Charley, though, had reflected upon the matter, and as he was a famous rough-and-tumble fighter, had come to the conclusion that a fisticuff match would be about the right sort of thing, and he speedily made known his idea.

"That suits me to death!" the Californian exclaimed.

"Wa-al, I s'pose that will agree with me too as well as any other way," Red Jack said. "But the pint is, which one of us shall have the fu'st chance at you, for I reckon if my pard gits in his work fu'st thar won't be no show for a chap 'bout my size."

"That would be tougher than all git out!" the High Horse admitted. "That reminds me of the boy who cried at the picture of Daniel in the lions' den. He wasn't worried 'bout Daniel, but he was so small, he was afeard thar wouldn't be enough of him to go 'round, and thar was one small lion in the corner he was mortally afeard would be left."

"But I know how to settle it. I'll fight you both at once, and if either of you don't get your stumjack full he must be a hog!"

The cowboy leaders looked at each other and then at their men, and their followers nodded, while Wamego Billy put his tongue in his cheek as much as to say, "Didn't I give it to you straight?"

"Both at once?" Red Jack asked.

"That's the lay-out I'm giving you."

"Oh, you're anxious to get killed!" Texas Charley exclaimed, rolling up the sleeves of his flannel shirt, displaying his muscular arms.

"Yes, yes, that is what I'm arter," the Californian answered. "Might as well be put out of my misery at once. But now, pards, I want a fair shake, you know."

"Oh, yes, we're squar' men every time!" Red Jack asserted.

"Hain't the least doubt of it, so jest order your outfit to draw off for a couple of hundred yards, so I kin hev a fair field. No objections to that, is thar?"

"Oh, no!" the cowboy captains replied in a breath.

Then, in obedience to their orders, the nine men, headed by Wamego Billy, retreated to the distance specified.

I tell you w'ot it is, boys, our pards will git everlastingly salted," Billy remarked to the rest of the cowboys as they retreated. "But I won't be one bit sorry for 'em, for they wouldn't take no stock in our story. Inside of ten minutes they'll wish they had, or else I'm no judge of bug-juice."

The rest coincided with this opinion.

Goldlace shoved his revolvers back in their holsters, cautioned the boy to stand back out of the way so that he couldn't possibly get hurt, and then remarked to the cowboy leaders:

"Now, gents, the circus is fixed to begin jest as soon as you git a good ready on."

Red Jack and Texas Charley did not wait for a second invitation but came up to the scratch at once.

"You clinch him, Texas, and I'll kick the stuffing out of him!" Red Jack whispered to his companion as they advanced.

This was easier said than done, for as the Texan, with a bull-like rush, endeavored to close with the Californian, he was met with a straight right-hander which, taking the burly fellow square between the eyes laid him over on his back as though he had been stricken by a thunderbolt.

Red Jack, rushing to avenge his comrade's fate, met with a similar reception.

He was felled as though some giant oak of the forest had fallen upon him.

Both of the men were knocked senseless.

The fight was over.

"Say! you cow-punchers, come and attend to your pards. I reckon they have got all they want from yours truly!" cried the Californian. "And you must excuse me, for I've got to be gitting."

"Trot along, you yaller sarpint!"

Away went the boy and the High Horse followed, leaving the cowboys to look after their beaten leaders.

Both of the men, when they came to their senses, were satisfied and wanted no more of the Californian.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE COUNCIL.

LEAVING the High Horse to follow his boy guide over the plain we will now transport the reader, in imagination, to a wild glen up in the hills about a dozen miles from Cibolo City.

As we stated in the beginning of our tale the country in the neighborhood of the mining-camp was rough in the extreme and settlements were few and far between, although the country was known to be rich in precious metals.

But it was within the lines of the territory claimed by the rude, red warriors, and which in their insolent way they termed "Apache-land."

As we stated, the Mexicans for years had been aware that there were rich mines located within this territory, but they never felt strong enough to endeavor to dispute the ground with the wild, red chiefs.

When the rowdy North Americans flocked into the country though, which they did like so many bees, when it was ascertained beyond a doubt that there were many rich ore deposits, the red warriors found that they had quite another kind of foe to deal with from the timid Mexicans who seldom could be induced to meet the dusky bold warriors in a fair fight in the open field.

The Mexicans fought tolerably well when protected by the 'doby walls of their ranches, but when it came to facing the feather-garnished chiefs in a fair hand-to-hand encounter they had no taste for the task.

The Apaches were in strong force in the neighborhood of Cibolo City, some of their choicest hunting-grounds being in that neighborhood, and they looked with a jealous eye upon the growth of the mining metropolis.

In the beginning the red-skins declared fiercely that the town should not exist and many were the bloody struggles that took place between the miners and the savages.

The Apache chief too whose particular tribe laid claim to this territory was one of the greatest braves that the warlike Apache nation had ever known, and that is saying a great deal, for the Apaches are second to no tribe in all the wild Western land, and they can, with justice, boast as many warriors and statesmen as any Indian tribe whose people have ever trodden the soil of the New World.

Mangus Colorado, the Apache chief was termed.

Red Blanket, to translate his name into English, a brawny savage, as brave as a lion and as crafty as the fox.

And in all the wild annals of the Western land no chief holds a higher record than this same ruthless red warrior.

From the beginning, Mangus Colorado swore that Cibolo City should not be, and the red chief did his best to keep his oath.

But it was not written in the book of fate that the red-skins should succeed.

Precious metals existed in large quantities in the Cibolo City district, and when the news spread through the border towns that a common miner with the rudest tools could easily make from five to twenty dollars a day there was a great rush for the new diggings.

The Apaches made a bold fight and in the beginning it was as much as any man's life was worth to wander away from the neighborhood of the settlements.

The red warriors were as keen on the watch as so many hawks, and many were the scalps that they captured in the beginning, but it was only at the outset that they could boast of success, for as soon as the miners discovered that the red-skins were disposed to be ugly they prepared to give them as good as they sent, as many a daring warrior discovered to his cost, being unceremoniously dispatched to the happy hunting-grounds in a way he despised.

The Apaches soon made the discovery that in the new men they had an entirely different foe from the listless Mexicans, and learned to govern themselves accordingly.

It did not take them long to find out that man for man, they were not a match for the newcomers.

And as soon as they came to this conclusion no longer did they attempt to meet the miners openly.

Secret cunning must accomplish what open force had failed to do.

Not that Mangus Colorado, or any of his braves, had given up the idea that they would be able to drive away the intruding white men,

but the trouble was to discover how to accomplish the trick.

They understood that there was a radical difference between the slothful Mexican and the pushing, aggressive, bearded strangers.

We have taken the pains to describe the situation at length so that the reader will be able to understand how matters stood at the time we introduce him to the camp of Mangus Colorado and his red warriors.

For in the little glade, to which we conduct the reader, situated on one of the head-waters of the Rio Cibolo, the camp of the Apaches had been pitched.

It is night, but the broad white moon, hanging high in the heavens, as round as the shields of the dusky warriors, gave such ample light that all objects were about as visible as by day.

It is a war-party, for there were no squaws present and the braves had all bedecked themselves with paint, so as to render their hideous visages still more horrible.

The North American Indian goes a great deal on the Chinese idea of making himself look as ugly as possible in the time of war so as to strike terror into the hearts of the enemy.

In the center of the glade the chiefs sat in council.

There was Mangus Colorado and a dozen other warriors, almost as equally renowned, besides a score or more of young braves who, whatever their abilities might be, had not yet made much of a name for themselves.

There were thirty bucks in the war-party in addition to the leader, Mangus Colorado, in person.

It was a picked body of men, and in all the great Apache nation there could not have been found thirty warriors of equal reputation.

The headquarters of Mangus's band was in a pleasant valley a good hundred miles to the northeast, but this glade wherein the war-party was now encamped was an old stopping-place of the dusky warriors, for in the little valley was wood and water, the hills in the neighborhood abounded in game and there were plenty of fish in the streams.

The war-party had been carefully organized by Mangus Colorado with the idea of striking a terrific blow at the settlers in Cibolo City, reports having reached the Apache chief that the town was growing rapidly, and therefore he had come to the conclusion it was about time something should be done to check the advance of the intruding white men.

The expedition had arrived in the glade early that morning, and after the camp was pitched Mangus Colorado dispatched two of his best warriors on a scouting expedition in order to ascertain the lay of the land.

And now the warriors sat in council, ready to receive the report of the spies.

Mangus Colorado had been planning this attack for a long time, and it was his wish to make the attack so complete a success—the blow such a terrible one—that the mining-camp of the digging pale-faces—as the Indians in contempt termed the miners—would receive such a check as it would not be apt to recover from in a long time.

The Apache chieftain had not been in the neighborhood of Cibolo City for nearly a year, and, therefore, had not the slightest suspicion that the straggling mining-camp, then only numbering twenty-five or thirty souls, had grown into a town which proudly called itself a city, and was indeed one, as cities go in the wild regions of the Far West.

The tree-that-splits and the Lone Horse were the two warriors who had been dispatched by Mangus Colorado on the scouting expedition.

Both of them were steady old braves, as wise as foxes and as courageous as lions.

Men equally renowned on the battlefield and by the council-fire, and from two such spies the Apache chieftain knew he would receive a just account.

The council-fire had been lit, and the two scouts took their places in the circle, then the pipe was lit and passed with true Indian gravity from man to man until it made the complete round of the circle and came again to Mangus Colorado, who had started it on its travels.

"The council is open, and may the Great Spirit, who reigns over the Happy Hunting Grounds, look down and bless us with his wisdom," the Indian leader remarked.

And all the red chiefs bowed their heads in reverence.

"Now speak, my brothers," continued Mangus Colorado, after the obeisance had been made.

"The ears of the council are open."

"Mangus Colorado and his brave Apache warriors are anxious to learn how these white dogs, who dig in the mud like the muskrats and the beaver, can best be driven from the land which belongs to the red-man."

A deep, guttural grunt, which went the round of the circle, amply testified that Mangus Colorado well represented the sentiments of the warriors who sat by the council-fire.

The tree-that-splits, being the elder brave of the two, was the first to speak:

"The words of the great chief of the Apache nation are wise, and they sink deep into the hearts of his warriors," said the old brave.

Again the grunt of assent came forth from the lips of the assembled braves.

"He is as wise as the beaver when he sits in the smoke of the council-fire, and as terrible to his enemies as the mountain lion when he puts on the war-paint."

Mangus Colorado bowed benignantly at the compliment, and a hum of approval from the rest of the warriors rose on the air.

"The tree-that-splits," continued the old brave, "opened his ears and listened to the words of the great chief, and then with his brother, the Lone Horse, he went to where the white-skins are digging in the mud by the Rio Cibolo."

"It is the truth," remarked the other scout at this point.

"The Lone Horse went with the The-tree-that-splits, and with their own eyes they looked upon the lodges of the pale-faces, who dig in the mud in the day and drink the fire-water by night."

"And did my braves remember the injunctions of Mangus Colorado to take a stick with them, and for each white man that they saw in the camp to cut a notch in the stick so that the Apache chieftain might know the number of the pale-faces, and so judge how best the attack can be made?" asked Mangus Colorado, a touch of eagerness in his voice.

There was a grave look on the faces of the scouts and a peculiar expression in their eyes as they listened to the words of the Apache chief.

Mangus Colorado was a keen observer; he did not fail to note the expression on the faces of the two, and he judged that something had gone wrong.

It was The-tree-that-splits who answered the question.

"The chiefs did not fail to heed the commands of Mangus Colorado," he said.

"With them they carried a stick, and for every white man that they saw in the pale-face camp by the Rio Cibolo, they cut a notch in the stick."

A smile of approval came over the massive face of the Apache chieftain, and he nodded his head in token of satisfaction.

He had been sorely afraid that the braves had neglected this precaution, and without knowing how strong was the force the white men could muster he would be all at sea in regard to an attack.

But he wondered, as long as his command had been obeyed by the warriors, why the peculiar look appeared in their faces.

He was soon to understand the meaning of the expression, though.

"Let my warriors deliver the stick so that their chief may count the number of the white dogs and calculate how many scalps the red warriors will be able to take to adorn their wigwams."

"The tree-that-splits produced the stick from among the folds of his blanket.

It was a piece of wood about a foot long and an inch in diameter, carefully wrapped in a bit of skin.

From hand to hand it was passed until it reached the grasp of Mangus Colorado.

"The chief thanks his warriors," he said with a stately inclination of the head.

"The Apache nation is proud of such braves. And then he unrolled the bit of skin from the stick and as his gaze fell upon it an exclamation of surprise came from his lips.

The stick was so covered by notches that it was utterly impossible to count them.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

TOMMIE APPEARS.

AND the rest of the warriors by the fire were as equally astonished as the chief, for they did not know what to make of it.

Curious eyes were bent on the two scouts, but they sat like statues, stolid as graven images.

"Wah!" ejaculated Mangus Colorado, "what does this mean, my brothers?"

"The commands of the great chief of the Apache nation were obeyed to the letter," responded The-tree-that-splits.

"The braves were instructed by him to cut a notch in the stick for every white warrior they saw in the pale-face camp by the Rio Cibolo—"

"Yes, that is the truth!" interrupted Mangus Colorado, unable to restrain his impatience. "But there are so many notches on the stick that it is impossible to count them!"

"Yes, and there are so many white warriors in the pale-face camp by the Rio Cibolo that the chiefs could not put a notch on the stick for every one of them."

At this announcement the Apache braves gazed at each other in vast astonishment.

If the statement had not been made by so good a warrior, and so wise a counselor as The-tree-that-splits, and backed up by Lone Horse, universally admitted to be one of the best men in the Apache tribe, it surely would have been suspected that there was some mistake or deception about the matter.

Mangus Colorado for all his knowledge, was the most astonished man in council.

"Wah! my brothers, have not your eyes deceived you? The chief cannot believe that it is possible the white dogs have increased so much."

"It is the truth," The-tree-that-splits replied.

"Where there was one pale-face a year ago now there are fifty."

"Fully fifty," assented the Lone Horse.

"But are they warriors—could not one Apache brave make a hundred of them fly as the clouds fly before the wind?" the Indian chief asked with true savage insolence.

The tree-that-splits shook his head gravely. Lone Horse followed his example and not a warrior in the circle but looked anxiously at his neighbor, for one and all understood that this was a bad sign.

The pale-faces are men, not children—they are warriors and, belted to their waists, carry many weapons."

"So are the Mexicans, and yet the Apaches for years have chased them like dogs," observed Mangus Colorado, arrogantly.

"These men are not Mexicans," Lone Horse remarked.

"They are the men from the land of the rising sun and they fight like devils."

And the whole assemblage nodded their heads as much as to say that they agreed with the idea.

Mangus Colorado surveyed the braves for a moment in silence.

As well as any warrior that ever wore a red skin he understood the dusk-faced warriors, and he could plainly see that the account given by the spies had cast a damper upon the spirits of the Apache braves.

To use the terse expression of the frontier, "you couldn't play no North American on them for a Mexican."

"They wouldn't have it!"

"No, no, no American in theirs, thank you!"

Already, by bitter experience, they had learned that the miners—the mud-diggers—could fight just as well as they could dig, and from the way the majority of the strangers carried themselves it really seemed as if they would rather fight than eat.

"Well, what think the Apache warriors?" the chief said at last.

"If the white-skins are so strong we cannot hope to drive them from their lodges with our small force."

Then up spoke a veteran brave—a man second in influence only to the chief, Mangus Colorado himself.

This warrior was called the Big Buffalo.

"To my mind it would seem as if the Apache braves were acting like children if they should attempt to drive the diggers from their lodges."

"The Big Buffalo has confidence in his brothers The-tree-that-splits and the Lone Horse—he knows that they speak with a straight tongue when they tell the story of the number of the pale-faces."

"The Big Buffalo has heard that their lodges have grown by Rio Cibolo as the mountain streams grow in the springtime when the snow melts in the mountain passes."

"The Apaches are not fools to heedlessly rush to death; besides the life of a red warrior is worth a dozen of these white, mud-digging dogs."

A hum of approval arose on the air when these words fell on the ears of the painted warriors.

No more arrogant and boastful creatures tread the earth than the dusky-hued fighting men, full of vanity are they also and it is an easy matter to tickle their pride.

"The Big Buffalo has spoken with a straight tongue, and his words are as full of wisdom as the egg is of meat," remarked Mangus Colorado.

A guttural "Ugh! ugh!" resounded from the lips of the circled warriors, which was as much as to say they agreed with the sentiment.

"The Apache nation cannot afford to throw away the life of a single warrior in order to win the scalps of a few white dogs."

"We must play the game of the panther who lies in wait for its prey and gives it to death without exposing his own life."

This idea suited the red chiefs exactly, and a unanimous grunt testified their approval.

"Since the pale-faces are too strong for us to attack them in their lodges by the river, we will cut them off, one by one, when we encounter them."

"We will take their scalps without risking the precious lives of the brave warriors of the Apache nation."

Again the grunt of approval told that the wily chief had struck the key-note of the red butchers' hearts.

The red Indian dearly prizes the scalp of a foe, but doubly dear is it if he succeeds in taking the trophy without the loss of life.

In the savage's opinion, the life of a single warrior is dearer than a hundred scalps.

And from this peculiar mode of thinking—which causes the red-skins to always attack in overwhelming numbers if they can, and run like a herd of frightened sheep when they find the fortunes of war are going against them, some people, strangers to the Indian customs, have sought to doubt their courage, but it is really their idea of the art of war.

Hardly had the grunt of approval died away when from a place of concealment up on the hillside rose the Indian bummer, Tommie.

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE PROPOSAL.

TOMMIE was a renegade Apache.

In the tribe he was known as the White Arrow, but having got into difficulties with one of his brother warriors in regard to a squaw, the wife of the other brave, Tommie had settled the question by eloping with the squaw one dark night, and though the injured husband gave immediate and hot pursuit, the guilty couple succeeded in getting away, and from that time the young brave had been an outcast from his tribe.

The squaw had been the wife of one of the old warriors of the tribe, a brave second only to Mangus Colorado, and, in fact, a powerful faction of the tribe at one time thought he had a better claim to the chieftainship than Mangus Colorado.

But as events proved that Red Blanket was the right man in the right place, the influence of the other chief had steadily declined, particularly as Mangus Colorado secretly did all in his power to do away with the popularity of the other. The red chieftain was a very Alexander, and brooked no rival near his throne.

So, although he had been a great gun at the time that Tommie had eloped with his wife, for it was the squaw of this chieftain who had caught White Arrow, yet now that three years had elapsed he amounted to no more than any other brave.

In fact, he was decidedly unpopular for he had had the misfortune to lead a war-party against the Navajoes, and was so unlucky as to fall into an ambush and very few of the party lived to tell the tale of the slaughter.

Naturally, the relatives of the dead braves blamed him for the disaster, particularly as he had been fortunate enough to escape from the fight without a scratch to show how desperate the contest was.

Dark hints were freely thrown out that Tall Thunder, as the chief was called, had run away and left his followers to perish by the hands of the foe.

All this conspired of course to undermine the reputation and standing of the chief.

Therefore, though it would have been as much as Tommie's life was worth if he had fallen into the power of his tribe at any time within a year or so of his escapade, yet now that time had dulled the remembrance of the wrong he had done, and the power of the man who had most cause to complain had waned, he might look for far more lenient treatment than he would have otherwise received.

In his heart Mangus Colorado was glad to see the young brave, although he put on a stern face when he surveyed him.

He knew what the appearance of the outcast warrior boded—a fight to the death between him and the man whose squaw he had stolen, Tall Thunder.

The wily chieftain had always liked the young brave, and now he fancied that if Tall Thunder claimed his revenge, as he was certain to do, the outcast warrior would be likely to make an end of him and this would remove from his way a man whom he hated.

"White Arrow wishes to return to his tribe," said Tommie, when he perceived that all eyes were fixed upon him.

"His heart is sore at being so long away from his people and he is hungry to sit again by the watch-fires of the great Apache nation."

Tall Thunder was on his feet in a moment, his face dark with passion.

"What outcast dog is this who comes and howls by the council-fires of warriors in the Apache-land? Creeping snake who stung the hand that warmed him!"

"My brothers, I demand the death of this accursed reptile!"

And the angry warrior shook his fist fiercely at the renegade.

"I have sinned and like an honest man I own my fault," replied Tommie, in no wise dismayed by the threatening aspect of the old warrior.

"I have lived among the white men, learned their ways and their art of war," he continued.

"And now that I have learned all the tricks of the pale-faces, my heart warms again toward the men who were once my brothers, and I come to you and say, here is one within whose veins flows the red life-current of the Apache nation, and I burn to again have the chance to shed my blood in defense of my native land."

"I would join with my brothers in taking the scalps of the intruding pale-faces who, like the muskrat, make holes in the earth."

"The renegade has broken the law of our tribe and I demand justice!" cried Tall Thunder, excitedly.

"It is the truth and I admit it, but the White Arrow is now a man again, and willing to do what is right."

"I will give up all I have to my brothers—thirty ponies and ten of the six-shooting little guns of the pale-faces."

This liberal offer caused a look of satisfaction to appear upon the faces of nearly all the braves in the circle.

Tommie had made a lucky strike in the Golden Palace of Durango at the monte table on the preceding evening, and when he found he was

flush with wealth he hastened to patch up a peace with his tribe.

The red-skin had a deep purpose in view, as the reader will see anon, or else he never would have been willing to part with his gains so freely.

The offer which the renegade had made was in accordance with the Indian custom which permits a man to make a bargain of this kind.

But the angry husband, who had been so unceremoniously deprived of the youngest and fairest squaw who adorned his wigwam, was in no mood to listen to any such arrangement.

The fascinating young Indian woman, by the way, had not tarried long with Tommie after they had eloped from the Indian camp and sought safety amid the white-skins.

A gay young miner had told his "soft tale," and as a result the squaw had "skipped" with the white man one night, taking everything of value that she could lay her hands upon.

"Bah! I spit upon the offer!" cried Tall Thunder in angry disdain.

"Blood alone will quench the fire which burns within my veins!"

The reply was as prompt as the defiance.

"Let the Tall Thunder draw his knife and meet the White Arrow in single fight!"

"My life is his if he is warrior enough to take it!"

And with the words the long knife of the red-skin flashed in the air, and quitting his position on the hillside, he advanced toward where the braves sat in council.

All eyes were fixed upon Mangus Colorado.

As the chief of the tribe he had the right to decide whether the duel should take place or not, although there was little doubt as to his action in the matter, for it is not once in a thousand times that the chieftain of the tribe will interfere in a matter of this kind when both men are satisfied to abide the result.

As the reader probably suspects Mangus Colorado was delighted with the way matters were going. He needed all the young desperadoes of the Tommie stamp, while he both distrusted and hated Tall Thunder.

"Let justice be done and the fight go on!" Mangus Colorado ejaculated with grim majesty, rising to his feet as he spoke.

His example was immediately followed by all the rest and then, breaking up into groups, they formed a large ring so that all would have a good view of the coming contest.

The moon gave ample light for the fight. Casting aside their blankets, with their long, keen-edged knives, glittering in the moonbeams, firmly clutched in their right hands the combatants faced each other.

It was the old story over again.

Tommie, in the very prime of life, gifted with great strength and uncommon quickness of foot, was far more than a match for the ancient warrior, whose joints were stiff and muscles rigid.

There was a series of rapid passes and then Tommie, pretending to recoil before the fierce attack of the other, fell back and, apparently, stumbled.

With a dash Tall Thunder was on him, quick to improve the supposed advantage.

It was a cunning trick.

Tall Thunder lost his guard and with a single thrust of his keen knife Tommie ended the contest.

Down went the old brawny warrior, with a stifled groan, and within an extremely short space his soul took its flight.

"Our brother has gone to the Happy Hunting-Grounds," observed Mangus Colorado, with befitting solemnity.

"But he has died as becomes a mighty warrior, and the Great Spirit will be pleased to receive him, for it is joy to his soul when a brave man dies with his face to the foe."

The body of the dead warrior was removed by some of his friends and then the council was resumed, Tommie taking the place which had been occupied by the dead chief.

By his liberal peace-offering, and his victory over the only man who had cause of complaint against him, White Arrow had made it all right with his brothers and was once again recognized as an Apache chieftain.

When the result of the deliberation of the warriors was made known to him and his advice asked, for Mangus Colorado reasoned that the residence of Tommie among the whites ought to make it valuable, he replied that they had jumped to a just conclusion.

The only way to fight the whites was to "go" for the outlying settlements and small parties of travelers, he said, and then he came to the purpose which he had in view when he sought the Indian camp.

He described how the High Horse, guided by a Mexican boy, was on his way across the plains, and suggested that the first blow at the whites be struck by gobbling up Goldlace, the son of the Pacific Slope.

Eagerly the warriors jumped at the idea and ten minutes later the band were in the saddle.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE ATTACK.

THE vengeful Tommie knew the exact route which the Mexican boy, who had been sent

to guide the High Horse, would take, and as he learned from the parties who sent the boy, their intention of so doing about five o'clock in the afternoon, they had plenty of time to be prepared for the attack upon the man for whose blood he thirsted.

Tommie knew the Indians were in the neighborhood, for he had caught sight of the Apache spies in the mining-camp that afternoon, and was too cunning a rascal not to suspect the object of their mission, but knowing he was in disgrace took care to keep out of the sight of the cowboys, but when he made the discovery that the High Horse would in all probability cross the solitary plain that night a scheme of vengeance came into his mind.

By making his peace with his tribe he would be able to get the Indians to attack the white-skins, and as he had a suspicion that the war-party was a strong one, there did not seem to be any chance for the white man to escape death.

So Tommie laid in wait for the scouts when they quitted Cibola City and tracked them to the war-party's encampment in the foothills.

This was not a difficult task for so experienced a warrior as the White Arrow to perform, particularly as the Apache spies had not the least idea of any one trying such a trick, and so never troubled their heads to keep a good lookout behind them.

The Indian had planned the scheme so well that the red-skins made their appearance on the edge of the plain just as Goldlace and the Mexican boy reached the center, and the nature of the ground was such that the Indians were able to get within half a mile of the two, before the others had any suspicion that there was any one in the neighborhood.

Flight was out of the question, as the red-skins were mounted, while Goldlace and the Mexican boy were on foot.

"Hello, hello!" exclaimed the High Horse as the Apache warriors suddenly loomed up on the horizon, their figures black against the moon. "It 'pears to me as if thar was a right smart chance for a leetle circus over yonder!"

"Oh, merciful heavens! it is the Indians!" cried the boy in an agony of terror.

"Yes, yes, I reckon they are Injuns, sure enough, 'cos you kin see their feathers and fixin's streaming out in the wind."

"But as I ain't lost any Injuns, I reckon that I ain't particular anxious for to find these chaps."

"Oh, these Indian braves are bloodthirsty wolves; we will be killed."

"Go long! we ain't done anything to the critters!"

"It does not matter, senor, these Apaches kill just for the love of killing."

"The cusses are coming at us just as if they meant mischief, as sure as you're born," the High Horse remarked, half to himself, as he watched the advance of the Indians with his keen eyes.

"We must run, senor!" exclaimed the boy, looking about him anxiously as though to ascertain the readiest way of escape.

"Oh, no, no, that chicken will not fight, nary time!"

"We are on foot and we couldn't hope to run away from them little Injun ponies. It is a clear onpossibility."

"We are in for it and all we kin do is to stand our ground and face the music as well as we kin."

"Mebbe we will have to do some tall dancing but I reckon those red-skins will do a little dancing also."

"Oh, if we cannot run we are lost!" wailed the boy.

"Nary time!" the High Horse replied, laconically. "Thar's many a slip between the cup and the lip."

"I have been in jest as tough a scrape as this afore and lived for to tell ov it."

"We might be a durned sight worse off than we are hyer. Thar's the river and we kin git it at our backs, which will prevent any one from taking us in the rear, and though it looks as if thar war 'bout fifty of these red-skins, yet as I am armed with a pair of seven-shooters, and am a tolerably fair shot, mebbe I will be able to give 'em a pretty decent sort of a fight, arter all."

While he had been speaking the High Horse had led the way to the river which at this point was broad and deep with steep banks, it now being the time of high water.

"Now, sonny, if you kin only keep your wits from gitting addled you kin be of a deal of assistance to me."

"I have gobs of cartridges so the red-skins can't run me out of ammunition."

The pair had gained the bank of the river by this time, descended under the bluff, and the High Horse, while continuing the conversation, had faced about so as to keep a watch upon the rapidly advancing foe.

"Now, when the reds charge in arter me, I'll blaze away at 'em with one revolver; then, when it is empty, I'll fling it to you and you kin shove fresh cartridges in while I blaze away with the other pistol, so I will be ready for 'em all the time."

"Oh, I cannot, senor, I cannot!" exclaimed

the boy, wringing his hands, evidently totally unnerved by the danger which threatened.

"When the Apaches rush upon us I shall die, I know I shall."

"Let us not attempt to fight 'em, senor, for that will only make them angry, but let us get down on our knees and beg them to spare our lives."

"Durned little sand to you, you fool boy!" Goldlace muttered.

"Don't yer know that these red niggers don't keer a durn fer sich behavior as that? Why, it would only make 'em laugh."

"The only way to produce any impression upon them is to give 'em a few revolver pills, and lay 'em out stiffer'n wedges."

"That is the only kind of talk that they kin understand."

"Oh, senor, I shall die of fright," moaned the boy.

"Darn me if I don't believe you will!" ejaculated the High Horse.

And then a bright idea flashed into his brain.

"Say, kin you swim?" Goldlace inquired.

"Yes, senor, yes, like a duck—there isn't any one in our district who can beat me, boy or man."

"Take to the water then; the current is running like a mill-race, and the chances are big that the red niggers won't trouble their heads about you, seeing that they will have their hands full to attend to a gentleman about my size."

"Hyer comes a good bit of a tree-trunk now. Go for it and when you reach the town tell the boys that I am in a heap of difficulty hyer and that they must either rescue or revenge me!"

"I will, senor, I will!"

And the way the Mexican boy stripped to his pantaloons and shirt was a caution.

Then into the river he went.

He had not boasted vainly in regard to his abilities in the swimming line for he was an artist indeed.

The tree-trunk was gained by him without difficulty, and as it was a massive affair, by getting on the opposite side of the tree to where the savages were he was well-sheltered from their fire.

This movement on the part of the boy did not escape the vigilant eyes of the Apache chieftain, Mangus Colorado, who rode at the head of the strange band.

"Ugh! the Mexican boy takes to the water like a muskrat."

"Lone Horse and Big Buffalo, see if you can take the scalp of this young white devil, but do not go far, for we may need every man to capture the giant pale-face yonder."

The two warriors detached themselves from the main body and rode off to carry out the orders of the chief, and since we may as well relate the particulars of their attempt here and to make an end of the matter, we will say that, thanks to the shelter afforded by the tree-trunk, the Mexican boy succeeded in dodging their shots.

Then they tried to get at the boy by riding their ponies into the stream, but the water was too deep and the current too swift.

As it happened, neither of the braves could boast of their swimming abilities, and in truth both of them were a little afraid of the rapid stream, speeding along like a race-horse.

So, after pursuing the boy for a couple of thousand yards they gave it up for a bad job and hurried off to join the main body, which had come to a halt upon getting within a thousand feet of the solitary pale-face.

The revolvers glistening in the High Horse's hands showed that the white man meant business, and so the Apaches came to a halt to deliberate about the matter.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

INDIAN DIPLOMACY.

"WAH!" ejaculated Mangus Colorado, as he reined in his pony, an example immediately followed by every other member of the band, "the white dog is showing his teeth—he intends to fight."

"He is mad!" exclaimed The-tree-that-splits. "What can one man do opposed to such a host as we have here?"

Tommie shook his head gravely. Experience had taught him that the stranger was as reckless and daring a white-skin as had ever set foot on prairie soil.

Although surrounded by a hostile force, with hardly one chance out of a thousand that he would be able to escape with his life from the trap in which he now found himself, yet he was presenting as bold a front as though he had an army at his back.

"The white dog is a devil; he does not seem to know that his scalp is at the mercy of the Apache warriors," Tommie remarked.

Mangus Colorado reflected over the matter for a moment.

That the white man stood any chance for his life he did not believe, for the idea was of course absurd that one man could succeed in beating thirty odd, although he had the advantage of being better armed, for although the Indians had firearms they were of ancient pattern, while

Goldlace's tools possessed the latest improvements.

At the time of which we write a paternal Government had not put into the hands of the red-skins the latest improved weapons so that they might the more easily "get away" with the hardy settler pushing on in the van of civilization.

Only a few of the Indians were armed with guns, and these were antiquated weapons about as dangerous to the men who fired them as to the foe at whom they were discharged.

And then, thanks to the peculiarity of the ground, the High Horse had a natural rampart, to shelter him from the fire of his assailants.

The Rio Cibolo was like a great many of the streams in the far West.

In the spring when the snows melted as if by magic in the mountains it was a howling torrent fifteen to twenty feet deep, so rapid and treacherous that it was almost as much as a man's life was worth to attempt to ford it; but when the torrid days of summer came, it shrunk into a mere ribbon of a river and a man could wade across it without having the water come above his knees.

And the result of this erratic sort of life was that at the point where the advance of the Apaches had forced the white-skin to take refuge by the stream, the Rio Cibolo ran between banks which at low water were fully twelve feet above the edge of the tide.

And although at the time of which we write the spring flood had not yet subsided, the stream was not carrying half the volume of water which the space between the banks would contain, so the banks rose a good five feet above the level of the river.

The High Horse had taken refuge below the bank, and thus was able to oppose a natural fortification to the advance of his assailants.

Mangus Colorado was a born general, if ever there was one in this world.

A hundred skillful movements in his career proved this beyond the shadow of a doubt, and if this wild, red, Western chieftain had had the advantage of education and a larger sphere of operations than that in which fate had seen fit to place him, there is not the least doubt that Mangus Colorado would have made a name that would have ranked high in the list of the great captains of the world.

The wily savage chieftain saw at a glance how strong was the position of the white man, and he blamed his own stupidity that he had not attempted when he advanced to cut him off from the river.

But when he came to reflect upon the matter, he saw that it would not have been possible to have accomplished such a maneuver under the circumstances, for the Mexican boy was conducting the North American up the trail, which was only a short distance from the stream, and it was not possible for the Indians to have advanced in such a manner as to get between the travelers and the river.

The problem which confronted the savage chief was a difficult one, and at present he did not see any way to solve it.

How could he take the scalp of the pale-face without losing any of his warriors?

As we in substance said a while ago, precious is the scalp of an enemy to the red warrior, and most precious of all is the scalp which is won without costing a life.

The red-skins are shrewd calculators in this sort of thing.

They will plan and plot and try a hundred devices to overcome their foes without being obliged to pay dearly for the triumph.

And the fact that the white man had succeeded in gaining a position where he was well-protected from the fire of his assailants, and it was as sure as anything could be that before they could succeed in killing the pale-face he would "wipe out" some of the red warriors, was what was troubling the Apache chieftain.

And in his perplexity, Mangus Colorado determined to try the old game—the game that has decoyed many a hapless emigrant-train to its doom.

He would use cunning before resorting to force; he would talk smoothly, and endeavor by lying assurances to induce the white man to come from behind his shelter, so that his scalp might be taken without endangering the lives of any of the red warriors.

It took Mangus Colorado but a few moments to come to this resolution; not so long, in fact, as we have taken in explaining the situation.

"As the white-skin intends to show fight, we must talk with a double tongue to him," the Apache chieftain observed, with a crafty smile.

"We must tell him that we are his brothers, and mean him no harm."

The warriors nodded assent, and a broad smile was on every face.

A trick of this kind was exactly to their fancy, and this is another peculiar trait in the Indian character.

To deceive a foe in this way is not deemed to be at all dishonorable; on the contrary, it is part of the art of war.

Like the peculiar code of morals which some of the wild tribes possess, wherein it is held to be perfectly correct to steal from strangers, pro-

vided it is not found out; but if a brave is unfortunate enough to be discovered, then the punishment is severe.

"I will talk to the white dog and see if I can get him to come out of his hole," Mangus Colorado observed.

"It is good," remarked The-tree-that-splits, "for if the Apaches try to take the scalp of the pale-face now, it will be apt to cost the lives of many warriors."

"The life of one Apache brave is worth more than the scalps of all the pale-faces from here to the big muddy river!" the chieftain declared.

"Yes, yes, it is true," assented the other chief, and all the rest of the warriors nodded assent.

"I will talk to him with a double tongue and play the snake, so that my warriors may bite him in the heel until he dies."

"We will advance until the white man shows his teeth."

Then the Indians rode slowly toward the point where the High Horse had sought refuge behind the river's bank.

Goldlace had kept vigilant watch upon the savage warriors, and when he saw them come to a halt and commune among themselves, he understood what they were up to as well as though he had taken part in the council.

"They don't like the looks of matters," he observed.

"They have jist made the diskivery that the snap is not going to be so soft a one as they had reckoned in the beginning."

"I'm only one man ag'in' twenty odd of the red bucks, but, thanks to this hyer intrenchment of mine, it will be apt to cost some of the red devils their lives afore they kin git me out of this."

"They have made that diskivery too, and now they are argufying 'bout the matter, trying for to find out which is the best way for to come at me."

"To sail in, exposed to the fire of my we'pons, and take the position by storm is a thing they despise, 'cos they know I kin down five or six of 'em, and so they are going to see if they can't fix up some raffle so as to git at me in an easier way."

"But it can't be did, you painted imps of Satan!"

And the High Horse shook his fist defiantly at his foe.

"I'm up to you and all yer tricks."

"I've got jist as nice a position for to make a fight hyer as a man would be apt to diskiver in a month of Sundays in all this hyer Western country, and I reckon you won't git me out of it, nohow you kin fix it, without my being able to make a heap of you eat dirt in a way you won't like."

Just at this point the savages commenced to advance, and Goldlace, whose quick eyes noted the movement the moment it began, immediately prepared for war.

"The crisis is about to begin!" he exclaimed.

"And you are coming to the right shop, boys, if you want fun, every time! and you can bet on it—yes, sir-ee, you kin bet all the wealth onto that you kin scare up!"

Then the advance came to a sudden halt again, and Mangus Colorado, detaching himself from the rest, rode forward.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND.

THE High Horse was too old an Indian-fighter not to understand the meaning of this movement.

"Hello! hello!" he cried, "the red bucks don't feel so 'tarnal sart'in 'bout this hyer leetle picnic as they might."

"They are not anxious for to have me wipe out a dozen or so of their warriors, and so they are going to try a leetle chin-music."

"But if they think they kin fool me, the red imps never made a bigger mistake in all their lives!"

"All this hyer gains time, though, and time is jist wot I want now."

Then Goldlace cast a hasty glance down the river in order to see how the boy was getting along.

Thanks to the swiftness of the current he was fully a quarter of a mile away, and the Indians who had been sent to intercept the Mexican lad having arrived at the bank, were riding along by the side of the stream, anxiously waiting for an opportunity to get a shot at the boy.

But the fugitive was wise enough to keep himself under the water, only allowing a small part of his head to remain above the surface of the tide—just enough so he could breathe, and as the current had carried him toward the eastern bank of the stream, while the red-skins were on the western side, he was amply protected from their bullets by the tree-trunk.

Goldlace, when he saw that the two warriors had arrived at the bank of the river, expected they would open fire upon the boy, and when they did not, his active mind soon guessed the reason.

"The leetle yaller-skin is too smart for them!" he exclaimed.

"He has hidden behind the log so that they can't find nary piece of him for to shoot at."

"It's a horse to a hen, I reckon, that he is going to git out of this pesky scrape, but whether I am going to pull through or not is another question."

"Anyhow, I will git a good ready on and make the best try for it that I kin."

By this time Mangus Colorado was within hailing distance and the High Horse prepared to receive him.

Knowing the Indians so well Goldlace was on the watch for some treacherous attack.

It is a common thing in a case of this sort, when the red-skins find their prey intrenched in a strong position and discover the coveted scalps and plunder cannot be taken without considerable risk, for them to send forward some wily, smooth-tongued warrior, who will by fair words endeavor to throw the game off their guard, and while the "talk" is going on the others steal in and then all of a sudden spring to the attack, generally getting around in the rear.

The High Horse was no greenhorn though and understood all these wily devices dear to the heart of the savage brave.

"I reckon the 'tarnal red imps can't play no surround game on me this time," he muttered, as he watched Mangus Colorado come slowly on.

"They can't git in my rear with this river at my back, nohow they kin fix it!"

"And when it comes to playing fox too, I reckon I'm jist as big a fox as any red nigger that was ever hatched."

"If this feller is one of the big chiefs—and I reckon he is, for some big man is always the one who comes forward to try the coaxing game, if he will only come near enough, mebbe, I will play a trick on him that he will despise."

"His leetle biz is to coax me to come out of my hole, hyer, so that the other 'tarnal imps kin git a whoop at me, then, wouldn't it be the biggest kind of a joke if I could coax him to come in so near me that, by a sudden dash, I could take him prisoner?"

And the High Horse laughed outright as he gave utterance to the words.

"If this hyer is one of the big chiefs of the party, an' the chances are mighty good that it is, it would be the biggest kind of a game for me to capture him, then I would have the dead-wood on the rest, and no mistake!"

"I could make 'em squirm, you bet!"

"I would jest yell out to 'em, 'See hyer, you durned no-souled, mud-colored, slab-sided heathen you, I've got my claws onto one of yer big warriors and if any one of you goes for to even crook a finger ag'in' me, I'll jest lay him out as stiff an' cold as a crowbar!'—and I would do it too! You kin bet on that!"

By the time that Goldlace finished his speech, Mangus Colorado had advanced as far as he judged necessary and came to a halt.

He gave the signal of peace—the signal which has deceived so many unfortunate white men, who believed that these painted devils can be trusted, and only realized they had been deceived to their ruin when the fierce war-shout of the savages pealed forth on the air.

Mangus Colorado stretched out his arms at right angles, with the open palms toward Goldlace.

This, in the sign language of the red-men, signified that he had no weapons in his hands, and desired to have a "peace talk."

"All right, I understand you!" exclaimed the High Horse.

"I am all for peace myself, you bet!"

And then, in order to give due emphasis to the words, Goldlace thrust his revolvers back into their holsters and clambered up on the edge of the bank.

When Mangus Colorado saw the white man come from behind the shelter of his ramparts his blood leaped quickly in his veins, and it was as much as he could do to resist yielding to the impulse which bade him give the war-cry, the signal for his band to advance.

But, by a great effort, he restrained himself for he knew that the game was not yet in his hands.

The white-skin had come from his refuge, but a stride would take him back again, and long before the Apache warriors could get close enough to do him damage he would be safe behind his natural ramparts.

He must induce the pale-face to come boldly out into the plain, so that the red braves would have a chance to cut him off from his fortification.

"The red chief is glad to see his white brother," Mangus Colorado remarked.

"Well, I can't say that I am tickled to death, myself, to run across you," Goldlace replied.

"But then you see, that is 'cos thar is a hull raft of you cusses while I am kinder playing a lone hand."

"Mebbe if I had twenty or thirty men at my back, and should run across you all alone, I should be a mighty sight botter pleased to see you than I am now."

"What difference does that make?" asked the Apache chieftain with well-assumed amazement.

"Are not the red-men and the white-skins brothers? Has not the war-hatchet been buried? Is thar not peace between them?"

"Sart'in, I hope so, at all events, jist now," the High Horse replied with a comical grimace.

"My brother is a stranger here—the red chief has never met him before?" Mangus Colorado observed with an inquiring glance.

"Wa-al, I ain't been long in this hyer deest-riect."

"Will not my brother come forward and meet my braves? They are anxious to make the acquaintance of the white giant, who looks to be as powerful as the wild buffalo," the wily Apache chief remarked in his smoothest tones.

"I reckon, chief, you will have to excuse me, 'cos, you see, I am the most bashful feller that kin be scared up from hyer to nowhars, and for to git introduced to sich a raft of big warriors as you have got out yonder would be sure to upset me."

"No, chief, I reckon you will have to count me out this time."

"My white brother must not fear that the Apache warriors would do him harm," the Indian said in his smoothest way.

"Oh, no, sakes alive! I ain't a bit-afeard 'bout that."

"In a time of peace you folks wouldn't go for to cut up any didoes—nary time!"

"My white brother had better come and shake hands with the red-men," Mangus Colorado urged.

"All those braves yonder are great chiefs—no better in the Apache nation."

"If my brother intends to remain in this land it would be wise for him to know these warriors, for they might be able to do him a service one of these days."

"The Apache braves are as true to their friends as the sun is to the earth, and as bitter to their enemies as the keen northern blast."

"So I have always heard, and I am right down glad to meet you, chief; but, I say, how may I call your name—I reckon you are one of the biggest bucks in the tribe, ain't yer?"

The question was shrewdly put, for it touched the savage's pride, and with a proud look he answered:

"There is no greater chief in all the Apache land than Mangus Colorado!"

"Mangus Colorado!" exclaimed the High Horse, to whom the savage was well known by reputation.

"The chief has said."

"He is a great brave, and his enemies, when they hear his name, fly as the leaves fly before the wind!" the Apache boasted with true Indian arrogance.

"Durn my skin if I ain't glad to see you, chief," Goldlace exclaimed.

"Although I have heered say that you wasn't over and above fond of your white brothers."

"It is a lie!" cried the Indian promptly.

"Mangus Colorado loves the white men, and so do the warriors of his band, and that is why the chief is anxious that his white brother shall go and shake hands with the red-men."

"And your boys don't go for to scalp the white men every time they run across them?"

"No, no, my young men are great braves. They fight the Navajo and the Comanche, but not the white-skins."

"They would not harm a hair of the head of my white brother."

At this point, the two Indians who had been in pursuit of the Mexican boy, disgusted at not being able to get at him, opened fire, hoping that some stray bullet might take effect.

"Pears to me that your young men down yonder are kinder showing their teeth, though," Goldlace observed, with a grin.

"It is a jest," replied Mangus Colorado, entirely unabashed.

"The boy runs—my braves run after him—it is sport to witness his fright."

"Yes, sport to your warroirs, mebbe, but it's death to the boy."

"See! my braves have tired of the fun."

It was at this point that the warriors gave up the attempt as a bad job.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CAUGHT IN HIS OWN TRAP.

"YES, yes, I see," Goldlace observed, casting a rapid glance down the stream.

All through the interview he had taken particular care to keep a watch upon the main body of the Apaches, and had noticed that they were gradually drawing nearer.

But they managed the movement in such a masterly way that it required a careful eye to discover the fact.

Each and every warrior had cast the reins of his horse upon the animal's neck, and the ponies immediately fell to cropping the grass, while their masters became apparently busy in conversation with each other; but, as the animals grazed, step by step they advanced nearer to the river, so that the whole cavalcade was really in motion, although at such a snail's pace that the advance could not be readily detected.

The High Horse saw that during the brief time he had been conversing with the Apache chief, the Indians had advanced fully a hundred feet, and he comprehended that there wasn't any time to be lost.

"My young men are peaceable—why should they not be?—there is no war between the white

men and the red," Mangus Colorado observed, as Goldlace cast his eyes down the river.

But the High Horse was not deceived by any of this specious talk.

He knew why the two red chiefs had given up their chase of the boy.

They had discovered that they were unable to either capture or kill him, and so had given up the attempt in order to return and aid their companions in the attack on him.

"Oh, this isn't a war-party, then?" the High Horse queried in the most innocent manner possible.

"Oh, no, we are on the hunt, and that is why my young men are armed."

"I see, I see."

"Will you go now and give them your hand in token that there is peace between us?" asked the savage, with a benignant smile.

"Sart'in!" exclaimed the High Horse, heartily, as though he had suddenly made up his mind to it.

"And gi'n me yer paw first."

Striding forward with a prodigious grin on his face, he extended his hand toward Mangus Colorado.

Although the Apaches were not apparently paying any attention to the interview between their chief and the giant white man, as they termed Goldlace, yet, in reality, not the slightest motion on the part of either one of the two escaped their keen eyes.

And when they saw the High Horse stride forward with outstretched hand, their exultation was great.

Their great chief had succeeded in deceiving the white man, and the giant brave was delivered into their hands.

"Wah! his scalp is ours!" was the whisper, which ran rapidly from man to man in the savage host.

But their exultation over the success of their leader in tricking the white chief was doomed to soon turn to utter dismay.

For no sooner had the High Horse clasped the hand which Mangus Colorado tendered him in good faith, never thinking of any trick excepting the one which he intended to play himself, than, with a violent jerk, he pulled the Apache leader out of the saddle and by the exercise of his wonderful strength dragged him over the prairie as though he had only been a child and disappeared with him down behind the river bluff.

The angry howls of the astonished and disgusted Apaches made the welkin ring, and, actuated by a common impulse, they charged madly to the rescue of their leader.

No sign did they see of the white man until they got within fifty feet of the bluff and were beginning to rein in their horses so as to avoid going into the river in their headlong haste.

Then up rose the High Horse from behind his fortification—a revolver in each hand and as they were double-action weapons, self-cockers, he managed to fire fourteen shots with a celerity and deadly execution which fairly took the breath of the savages away.

In their wild rage at the unceremonious capture of their chief they had neglected their usual cautions and charged in a body, so the well-aimed revolver-shots of the white foe did a deal of damage.

Brave as were the Apaches it was not in human nature for men to persevere in an attack after being received in so warm a manner.

Eight men of the band were on the ground, either dead or badly wounded, four more had "stopped a bullet," but retained sufficient strength to cling to their ponies, so that they could retreat from the disastrous field.

Tommie, alone, of all the band kept his head, and endeavored to rally the panic-stricken warriors.

"Hold, my brothers!" he cried. "The white-skin has fired all the shots he can and is now at our mercy! His scalp is ours!"

But even as he uttered the boast the High Horse took deliberate aim and with a single shot tumbled him from his saddle.

Tommie had "forgotten to remember" that Mangus Colorado had a pair of good revolvers, and that it was an easy matter for the white brave to possess himself of the weapons after he had bound the Apache chief "neck and heels" with his own lariat.

The downfall of Tommie completed the discomfiture of the Indians, and they fled in wild disorder, and halted not until they were fully a thousand yards away.

"By king! I reckon this hyer fight ain't going to be so one-sided arter all!" the High Horse exclaimed, in triumph, as he witnessed the hasty retreat of the foe.

"I have managed to salivate ten of you red cusses in the worst kind of way; that is about a third of your gang laid out, to say nothing of the fact that thar must be three or four of you red devils who have leaden pills into 'em, which can't be over and above comfortable, and which won't be apt to make 'em anxious for to try a taste of any more of the same medicine."

These words were as gall and wormwood to the ears of the Apache chieftain, the more so that he could not gainsay their truth.

He had been beaten at his own crafty game—

caught in his own trap, and then when the fox's cunning had failed to trap the white brave and the Apaches advanced to play the lion they had been woefully defeated.

And what galled the Indian chieftain more than anything was the knowledge that it was hopeless; to expect that where thirty odd had failed to whip the stranger two-thirds of the number would be more successful.

Despite the disgust he felt and the rage that was tearing at his heart the savage chieftain managed to preserve a stolid indifference, just as if he was indifferent to the decrees of fate.

"You are not wise to provoke the braves of the Apache nation, for sooner or later you will be killed for this night's work," the savage said.

"I reckon I would have been killed anyway if I hadn't fought, so it doesn't matter much."

Then all of a sudden the idea occurred to Mangus Colorado that he had been going on the wrong tack.

The wonderful strength and prowess which the stranger had displayed made it evident that it would be better to have him for a friend than a foe.

The Apaches had paid dearly for the discovery though, but still Mangus Colorado, with true Indian fatalism, did not repine at that.

"Wah! the red braves made a mistake when they attacked my white brother and they would be friends with him."

"They will forget the dead braves—they will forget the blood that has been shed and remember only that the white chief is a mighty warrior and that those who dare to attack him rush madly to their death."

"Kinder reckon you have got all the fight you want, eh?" the High Horse remarked with an earnest gaze at the face of the other, as if he thought he could read there whether the savage was in earnest or not.

"It is the truth—we will fight no more."

"That suits me. Now I'll tell you what I'll do. Order one of your band to bring up two horses. You mount one and I the other, and we will ride to Cibolo City, your band to remain here. When I am in sight of the town you are free to depart."

Gladly the savage accepted the offer, and within ten minutes the two were on their way, while the rest of the warriors turned their attention to the dead and wounded.

Although Tommie had apparently gone down like a dead man yet his wound was only a slight one and he was soon in the saddle.

Bitter were the reproaches heaped upon him though for having induced the band to attack such a mighty warrior and he was soon glad to make off.

He thought it best to seek refuge among the whites for some time to allow this tempest to blow over.

When the High Horse got within view of the lights of Cibolo City he dismissed the chief, who returned to his mountain home, a sadder but a wiser man.

When Goldlace entered the mining-camp he found the town in a ferment.

Warned by the Mexican boy the miners were preparing to go to his rescue.

"It's all right; they hauled off when the red cusses found I meant business," he explained.

"And now, my leetle yaller-skin, s'pose we try our rifle ag'in!"

The boy was willing and again the two set out.

CHAPTER XL.

THE REVELATION.

NOT the slightest fear that he would be entrapped dwelt in the mind of Goldlace.

He was well-armed, the self-cocking revolvers which he had procured from the generous-minded female boot-black were belted to his side, and equipped with such tools as these, which could be drawn and fired while a man armed with the ordinary pistol was getting his weapon in order for work, it was almost impossible under ordinary circumstances for a foe to get "the drop" upon him.

Besides, there were some parts of the boy's story that he felt sure were true.

The black-bearded fellow had been badly hurt in the fight in the Fandango Hall. With his own eyes the Californian had seen him go down, and at the time he had muttered, "Well, that's good-by, black-beard!"

It was only natural, too, under the circumstances, when the Mexican felt death was drawing nigh, he should endeavor to make his peace with man in anticipation of a visit to the other world.

The Mexicans as a race are greatly given to superstition, and if a priest had been called, it was certain that he would not give the dying sinner absolution, and so smooth his path to the regions beyond the skies without he did all that was possible to repair the sins which he had committed.

It was reasonable, too, that the wounded man should feel somewhat aggrieved at the trickster whose gold had been the means of bringing him to his present unfortunate plight.

Therefore, to Goldlace, the reasons why everything ought to be fair and honest seemed strong-

er than those which would make him suspect there was a trap.

To one of the common "doby" houses, built after the Mexican fashion, and situated about a mile from the town, the boy conducted the High Horse.

The house only contained one room, which was scantily furnished; there was a rude sort of bed upon which the sick man was stretched, and a small table by the head of the couch, upon which burned a candle amid a half a dozen of medicine vials.

By the table was a chair, and in the chair sat the Mexican girl, Catarina, attentively watching the sufferer.

At the foot of the bed was a small stool, in one corner of the room was a pile of wolf and buffalo robes, and that was all.

That black-bearded Jose Camargo was dangerously near to death it needed but a single glance at his face to discover.

The few hours that had elapsed since he had received his wound had wrought a wondrous change in the once strong man.

A look of grim satisfaction appeared on his face as he looked with his black bead-like eyes upon his visitor.

"Did I not tell you so, Catarina?" he said, his formerly hoarse voice weak and thin.

The girl nodded her head.

"I knew he would come. I do not love the North Americans, but I will own, even upon my dying bed, that they have the pluck of bulldogs."

"The girl was afraid that you would not come when you received my message, for fear it might be a trap, but I felt sure you would."

"Bah!" says I to her, "the man is so venturesome that he does not know what fear is."

"Sit down."

And with his feeble hand he motioned to the seat at the foot of the bed.

The High Horse obeyed the gesture.

"You have been told that I am not long for this world."

The Californian nodded.

"It's the truth. I can feel it sure enough. I should have known it, even if the doctor had not informed me."

"Here am I, Jose Carmargo, Black-bearded Jose as they used to call me when I first showed them that I was a man able to hold my own against any two ladrones in the district, but now I am so weak that I could not overcome a five-year-old child."

"And this is partly your work, American."

"Yes, but much more due to your own conduct," the High Horse replied. "Why did you seek to attack me and compass my death?"

"Well, in the first place on account of the little squabble that we had in the saloon, when you handled me and my Indian pard so roughly. I wanted to square that account; and then, too, I was well paid to attack you by a man who desired your death."

"The man who once called himself Aban Vali?" said the Californian.

"Yes, that's the boss; he was determined to get you out of the way, for he knew that if you once discovered him it was a question of life and death."

"But I say, who was it that came so unexpectedly to your assistance when we had you corralled in the Fandango Hall?" the dying bandit asked. "Who was it that put that cursed ball into me that is sapping my life away?"

"What will it profit a man so near to death as yourself to know?" asked the Californian, determined not to reveal the secret, for he guessed that the brigand might have an idea of leaving behind him a legacy of revenge.

"Oh, well, it would be some little satisfaction, that's all."

"Turn your thoughts to other matters, for that is a secret that I shall not reveal."

"Suit yourself," retorted the bandit, sulki-

ly. "But now regarding this communication which you desired to make to me."

"Concerning the name of your foe?"

"Yes, that is what I wish."

"Aban Vali?"

"But he is not known by that name now."

He would be a fool indeed to travel under it with some half a dozen men like yourself, eager to drink his blood," the other replied.

"But what does he call himself?"

"Wait, let us see if it is the same man. Some twenty years ago he married a girl in some one of the eastern cities of your country, dazzling her eyes with the idea that he was independently wealthy, owning half a dozen gold mines."

"Yes, my sister."

"I can see the resemblance for I knew her once. Soon the mask was torn away, though, for the man was a swindling adventurer, a gambler, living by his wits."

"But the woman stuck to him for the sake of the child which had been born, a baby girl, and followed his fortunes until his cruel treatment sent her into the grave about a year ago."

"Yes, yes; and the child?" cried the Californian, rising in agitation.

"Look upon this girl," and the brigand pointed to Catarina; "can you not trace in her face a resemblance to your dead sister?"

The maiden was now upon her feet, trembling with emotion.

"She is the child, and her father is the man that all the world supposes to be her uncle. For years he has repudiated his daughter for fear some foe, by that clew, could hunt him down."

"Then Aban Vali is—"

"Estavan Javali, at your service!" cried that worthy, rising from behind the pile of robes where he had lain concealed, a cocked revolver in his hand, which he leveled full at the breast of the Californian. "American, you are in a trap—you have tracked the tiger to his den, now feel his claws tear at your heart."

He pulled the trigger, but as he did so, with a loud shriek, the hapless girl whose whole life had been such a hollow mockery, threw herself before Goldlace and, receiving the assassin's ball in her own breast, sunk lifeless to the floor.

Swift as the stroke of the lightning, vengeance came.

In an instant the Californian's knife was out, and, before the Mexican could cock the revolver, it was buried to the hilt in his vile heart, killing him instantly.

Nor was vengeance less swift to overtake the villain who, on the very verge of the grave, had stooped to assassination.

In his fury at seeing his ancient associate slain, he attempted to rise from his couch, burst a blood vessel in the attempt, and died immediately.

The Californian's quest was ended and justice had been done, although the innocent life of the hapless girl had been offered up as a sacrifice.

Our story is told, but with the accomplishment of his purpose the Californian did not turn his wandering footsteps to other fields and pastures new.

He liked the town and determined for a time to remain there.

And the first business to which he turned his attention was the extermination of all the Mexican bravos who hung around the town.

Tommie the renegade red-man, was the first to feel the avenging arm of the High Horse.

Being detected in cheating at cards, he was dragged by the High Horse to the center of the town, tied to a tree and thrashed with a raw-hide until he howled for mercy.

When released he was warned never to show himself in the camp again unless he came prepared to lead a better life, and he slunk away.

Both the Dutchman and the veteran bumper were glad when Goldlace announced that he should stay some time in the camp.

"He's an honor to the town!" Major Bum declared.

"By chimney Christmas dot vas so, you bet me four dollars and a haluf on dot!" Jake assented.

But after all, were not the charms of pretty Posie the magnet that detained in the camp of Cibolo City, our hero, Gideon Goldlace, the High Horse of the Pacific?

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